THE LAST CHANCE

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

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A TALE OF THE GOLDEN WEST

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A Tale of the Golden West

BY

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

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'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS,' 'THE MINER'S RIGHT,' 'THE SQUATTER'S DREAM,'
'A COLONIAL REFORMER,' ETC.

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CHAPTER I

As a Commissioner of Goldfields, and Police Magistrate, in New South Wales, it is hardly necessary to say that Arnold Banneret's pay was not conspicuously in advance of the necessaries of life. Necessaries which may be thus catalogued: a couple of decent ride-and-drive horses, a light, much-enduring buggy, clothes and books, boots and shoes, bread and butter, for half-a-dozen growing boys and girls — with an occasional trip to the seaside, and a regularly recurring doctor's bill; while the Rev. Mr. Wilson's quarterly accounts for the eldest boy's board and tuition had also a knack of turning up inconveniently soon, as it appeared to paterfamilias, after his departure to school.

He was leaning against the corner of the police barrack, having just returned from a long official ride with Inspector Falcon, revolving the question of ways and means, or else the conflicting evidence in a knotty, complicated mining case, upon which he had reserved his decision. He had invested all the money he could spare (this was before the

latest mining Act) in a promising claim, which had turned out worthless. His tradespeople, usually forbearing, had suddenly disclosed monetary pressure—requiring to be relieved by cash payment. Altogether, the outlook was overclouded — there was even a presage of storm and stress.

The Inspector had departed to dress for dinner, invited thereto by a wandering globe-trotter, known to his family in England. The Commissioner's clerk, newly married, had gone home to his wife the moment the clock struck four—indeed, a few minutes earlier.

It was growing late; the minor officials had retired to their several quarters. His horse was finishing the corn which had been graciously ordered for him by the Inspector, and, strange to say, though in the centre of a populous goldfield, a feeling of loneliness and silence, almost oppressive, commenced to manifest itself.

He was about to bridle his horse, and depart for his home, a few miles distant from the goldfields 'township' of Barrawong, where ten thousand miners with their families, tradespeople, officials, and camp-followers generally, had made provisional homes, when his eye was attracted by a man at some distance, walking slowly towards him. A footsore tramp, evidently—'remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.' As he approached, Banneret's experienced eye told him that the man before him had been ill —probably short of food—had broken down on the road, and was now straining every nerve to get to town, probably to be admitted into the Public

Hospital, so often a haven of rest and refreshment to the invalid wayfarer. When the 'traveller,' as a nomadic labourer is termed in Australia, came up to the barrack, the Commissioner was shocked at his emaciated appearance and deathlike pallor. His hollow cheeks and bloodshot eyes proclaimed a struggle with weakness, dangerously protracted. His patched and threadbare garments told a tale of want and absolute poverty, rare in this land of careless plenty and comparative extravagance. It appeared as if the succour might even now come too late, as to sailors stricken with that mysterious malady of the sea, which decimates long-exiled crews, landing them only to die, with the scent in their nostrils of the freshly turned loam. As he came within a few paces of the Commissioner, he staggered and almost fell. That official sprang forward and caught him by the arm. 'Why, Jack Waters!' he said—'I should hardly have known you. What have you been doing to yourself?'

'It's what's left of me,' said the exhausted man, hardly able to speak, it would seem, and trying as he did so to manage a sickly smile—a most melancholy attempt. 'Where I've been and what I've gone through's a long story; you might be in it towards the end, so we'd better come into the "Reefer's Arms" (old Bill Barker's alive yet, I suppose) and talk it over a bit. You know me, Mr. Banneret, this years and years, and you always found me straight, didn't you?'

'Certainly I have; I never thought anything

to the contrary. But what's this great affair you want me to hear about? Won't it do to-morrow? Stay at Barker's to-night; I'll shout your night's lodging, you know.'

'To-morrow mightn't do, sir; and if you'll take a fool's advice, you'll get his back room to sit in, where we can yarn without people hearin' all we say, and do a bit o' business, comfortable like. And it *is* business, my word! You don't hear the like every day.'

The Commissioner, as became his office, was not in the habit of hobnobbing with miners promiscuously. He was reserved of manner, more affable indeed to the ordinary miners than to his equals, whom he treated with scant courtesy—particularly if his temper was ruffled.

But this man was an exceptional inhabitant of the gold region. Having known him for many years, he was in a position to prove against all comers that he was one of the most energetic, honest, capable workers that he had ever known upon this or other goldfields.

When about to be sold up, through no fault of his own, having gone security for a friend, the Commissioner came forward and provided a guarantee. This prevented the forced sale, after which Jack had a stroke of luck, and repaid every farthing. Since this occurrence he had been what the Commissioner called 'ridiculously grateful.'

Departing from his ordinary custom, and walking into the 'Reefer's Arms,' he asked the landlord, a burly ex-miner, popularly known as Bill the

Puddler, 'if there was any one in the inner parlour?'

'The shareholders in the "Blue Lookout" had it all the morning—a-settling after their last wash-up—but they've just cleared, and you can set there, quiet and comfortable, Commissioner. *Why*, what's the matter with *you*, Jack?' he continued, looking with sudden interest at the worn limbs and sunken features of the digger.

'Had the fever at Ding Dong. Want the Commissioner to get me into the hospital—going to make my will first. Send us in a bottle o' beer, and a bite o' bread and cheese, and don't yabber.'

As he spoke, the exhausted man reeled rather than walked along the passage leading to an inner apartment, and opening the door with a show of familiarity, threw himself upon the well-worn sofa, which, with a few chairs of various patterns, and a serviceable table, made up the furniture of the room. Then he closed his eyes as if about to faint.

Mr. Banneret walked quickly towards him, but he put up his hand warningly, and murmured, 'All right directly. Wake up when Bill's a-coming; that's what's the matter.'

Although the wayfarer closed his eyes and lay as if insensible, he raised himself when the host appeared a few minutes later, and assumed an air of comparative alertness.

That it was a miserable assumption Mr. Barker appeared to divine, as he drew the cork, and poured out two glasses of the bitter beer, departing without

further comment, and casting as he went a searching glance at the miner who was so 'infernally down on his luck,' as he would have phrased it. His footsteps had no sooner ceased to be audible, after reaching the end of the corridor, than the miner drained his glass, with a sigh of deepest satisfaction, saying, 'Here's luck this time. Would you mind lockin' the door careful, sir? It'll save my bones a bit, and they won't stand much. You'll see my dart directly.'

This precaution being duly carried out, he proceeded to unbutton a tattered woollen shirt. Below this was another in rather more careful preservation. Placing his hand in the region of his belt he produced a long canvas package, which had been secured to it, and which fitted closely round his body above the hips.

'Blest if I didn't think it was goin' to cut me in two this last week,' he said, throwing it on the table; 'it rubbed me awful, and I dursn't take it off and give any one a show to collar it. There was rough coves where it come from, you bet, as would have had a man's life for half the stuff that's there. Please to open it, sir. Take your knife to the stitchin'; it ain't been touched since I put it in.'

The end being ripped open, and part of the side of the twine-stitched casing, the quartz specimens thus released rolled out on the table. They were rich indeed—almost fabulously so.

The Commissioner's experienced eye gleamed, and even the sunken orbs of the miner showed a fresh, though faint glimmer, as the pale stones

'strung together with gold,' in miner's parlance, lay heaped together.

'And do you mean to say, with five hundred pounds worth of specimens and nuggets in your pocket'—here he took up a small lump of pure gold—'a five-ounce bit, if it's anything—you nearly starved yourself to death—nearly died on the road? Hang it, man! you've run it too fine altogether.'

'Couldn't help it, Commissioner. What was I to do? You know what a new rush is like. Wouldn't they have tracked me up, and pegged over the ground, if they'd known I'd gold about me? I'd have lost my year's work—hard work, and lonely—starving myself all the while; perhaps had a crack on the head as well. And then where'd we been? For I'm going to give you a half share, Commissioner, if you'll see me through, so's I can go back, and take up the lease proper and ship-shape. I hadn't a shillin' when I come away from the find, nor an ounce of flour, nor a bit of sugar; meat I hadn't seen for a month; I was afraid to go for it. So I gammoned sick when I come in. It didn't take any painting to do that. Said I'd been doin' a "perish" in the ranges (wrong direction, of course), and was all broke up. Begged most of the way back—many a long mile, too—and here I am!'

'Take another glass of beer,' said the Commissioner, 'and finish the bread and cheese. I'm going to dine. And now what do you want me to do?'

'You'll find me five hundred pound, Commis-

sioner ; less won't do. It's a long way to travel, but that says nothin'. That'll about fix up the lease deposits—the rations, cart and horses—and what's wanted for me and a mate. That's all I'll take *if* I can get a good one that can work and hold his tongue. I'll transfer half my share in the lease to you, and a better day's work you never done in your life. You see this—it's nothing to what's below. I covered the reef up. Sixteen foot wide, good walls, thick with gold, reg'lar jeweller's shop.'

'Well, of course, you know, I've heard all this before. Heard it all, and more too. Seen specimens as good as these, and better ; and what did it all come to ? Duffered out inside of three months, and never paid for candles.'

'I've been diggin' nigh hard thirty year—been a "forty-niner," and so help me, God Almighty ! I never dropped across a show like this afore—or within miles of it—for the real, solid stuff.'

'Well, but five hundred pounds is a large sum. I'm not a rich man, you all know. It gives me enough to do to pay the butcher and baker. I should have to give security over everything I possess to raise it. Mr. Bright, the banker, would not advance it without security, to save my life, I had almost said. He dared not do it, for one thing.'

'Now, look here, Commissioner ! did you ever know me tell a lie ? I drink a bit, sometimes, but '—and here the wasted form was straightened with an effort, and the hollow eyes gazed into the magistrate's face with an intensity almost appalling

—'no living man can say that Jack Waters told a lie, or hid the truth. When I say I *saw* and *touched*, by the Lord Almighty! what 'ud make you and me, and a dozen more, rich for life, won't you believe me?' and here, as if exhausted by the temporary excitement, the old man sank upon his knees, and raising his hands, as if in prayer, cried aloud, 'For God's sake, Commissioner! for the sake of your wife and children, go into this thing with me, or you'll repent it to the last day of your life.'

Arnold Banneret gazed at the kneeling figure, stood for one minute in earnest thought, and then said: 'All right, I'll risk it. We'd better call it "The Last Chance," for if it fails, I'm a ruined man.'

'You'll never be ruined this side of the grave, sir,' said the miner, as he slowly rose to his feet. 'If you mortgage the shirt on your back, and the shoes off your feet, it's the best day's work you ever did. I've seen a man write a cheque for a half share in the No. 1 British Hill, as was offered him on the ground floor. He jibbed on it, and tore up the cheque. He knows *now* that he tore up a fortune that day. But you'll be right, Commissioner. There's no go-back in you, I know from old times.'

'True enough, Jack; I don't change my line. Well, we must get to business. I'll have an agreement drawn up, in case of accidents, as well as a transfer of the half share in the claim—I'll find the five hundred pounds. By the bye, there's another thing—how about the grog?'

'From the day I leave here, sir, I don't touch a drop, if it was to save my life, till the first crushing's out. Then you'll have enough to pay managers and wages men, enough to run a town —you can do without poor old Jack Waters, even if he does break out, and something tells me he won't—till the biggest part of the thing's through. What's more, I'll make my will, and leave you the whole boiling, so if anything should happen to me, you'll have the lot.'

'That's unnecessary. I couldn't take your share, in any case, on any account. Your relations ought to come first, you know.'

'Relations?' echoed the old man, with a strange laugh. 'When I ran away from home in Cornwall, I had only two people as cared to own me—my poor mother, the fellow that married her, and killed her with ill usage. She's dead years ago, and he's in—well, I won't say where—he might have repented, you know. There's no living soul claimed kin with me when I was poor, and I'm not going to give 'em a chance when I'm rich. No, you shall have the lot, to do what you like with, when poor old Jack takes up his last claim in the alluvial. And now I'll have a bath, a square meal, and a good sleep till to-morrow, while you take charge of these specimens, and work the Bank business—Mr. Bright is a good sort, and he'll spring a bit if he sees his way.'

. . . . . .

The Commissioner proceeded to his office, where he carefully locked up the precious stones —precious in every sense of the word—in the

Government safe. He made a second inspection, after which his brow cleared, and the usual confident expression returned to his features. Before leaving for his home he had a private interview with his banker, who was fully acquainted with his pecuniary position.

'How do, Banneret? pleased to see you; your quarter's pay has just come in. That's all right as far as it goes—so you want five hundred pounds for a mining venture? Rather a speculation, of course. But we're all in that line here, worse luck. I dropped a hundred over that rascally "Blue Lookout"—blue enough it turned out—and there's "Flash in the Pan" that I nearly bought into, paying a whacking dividend, and getting better as it goes down. You'll give security, of course? What is it?'

'Every mortal thing I've got—cows and horses, buggy and harness, furniture, saddles and bridles. Everything but the wife and children. You may put the whole lot into a Bill of Sale, and sell me up if the thing goes wrong.'

'Hum! ha! We'll see about that. But of course the directors look at the security, and slang me if I give you an over-draft without it. I'll have it ready to-morrow. The show's extra good, I suppose?'

'Out and out; never saw anything like it.'

'Yes—of course, I know, and as safe as houses. They all are. Well, good-bye; I wish you luck. You won't stay and dine with me?'

'Thanks very much. I must go home'; and they parted—the banker to dine at the hotel

ordinary, and forget his business worries over a game of billiards afterwards ; the Commissioner to ride home in the dark, revolving in his mind the pros and cons of the most risky speculation in which he had embarked for a while—after indeed resolving that *never again* would he risk a penny in those infernal gambling, deceitful, fascinating gold shares which, like the Sirens of old, lured the unwary to destruction, sooner or later.

CHAPTER II

'WHAT's been bothering you, my dear?' queried the partner of his joys and sorrows—of which, indeed, she had borne more than her share during the latter years of their married life. 'Those Antimony Lead people been having a deputation again? Or the "Western Watchdog" been barking at you? Never mind them, now. Come and look at Baby—she's fast asleep, and looks so sweet and good—you can tackle those dreadful people after breakfast to-morrow—the proper time, as you always say.'

'The Antimony Lead has relieved me, by "duffering out," at No. 14—"No gold, no litigation," is a safe rule in mining—and the "Watchdog's" bark is stilled for a time. But you are right. I have something on my mind, connected with mining'—and here he seated himself in an arm-chair, and with his wife's hand in his, opened his heart, by a full disclosure of facts, to that faithful helpmate and capable adviser.

Mrs. Banneret was a woman of exceptional courage, and capacity in business matters—such as few men are privileged to win and wear in

the alliance matrimonial. Without binding himself to be guided by her advice in the battles of life, her husband made a point of hearing her views—if time permitted—before engaging in action. Cool, sensible, and, withal, courageous to dare, as well as to suffer, his plans were often modified, if not changed, after hearing her opinion.

In this particular skirmish with fortune, he had, however, been compelled to act promptly on his own responsibility. He knew mines and miners,—that strange earth table, where lay such wondrous prizes; the game on which the cards meant want or wealth, and of which the counters were men's lives. The opportunity—one of those which come rarely, if more than once in life—was too precious to let slip. Weak and low, after his hardships—if he had refused to accede to the old man's proposals—he might, in despair, have adopted the fatal remedy, lost his gold, or transferred the greater part of his interest to one of the astute speculators always so numerous upon goldfields.

He had made the plunge. He had put fame and fortune on the cards—more or less—and must stand the hazard of the dip. Not, of course, that an officer of his character and experience would have lost his position by being sold up, and rendered temporarily homeless, as long as nothing worse could be laid to his charge than imprudence in speculation.

There were very few residents in any class, caste, or occupation in Barrawong who had not

had a throw for a prize in the game of 'golden hazard.' But none the less, if it came out a blank, it would involve serious loss, bitter mortification, and more or less privation to be shared by every member of the household.

Mrs. Banneret listened gravely to the narrative, after the first few sentences, which contained the key to the situation. She said nothing until the story was ended, and then proceeded to a cross-examination very much to the point, as her husband had had previous occasion to note. She commenced cheerfully. So does the *rusé* barrister, affecting an air of light raillery, as he reassures the witness, out of whose heart he resolves to tear the truth before he has done—regardless of laceration, how cruel soever, to that organ, in the process.

But this advocate had no such feeling. She was not an advanced woman. Gifted with intelligence sufficiently clear to perceive the differing treatment of the sexes at the hands of society, she was yet fixed in the opinion that, by marriage and motherhood, a woman's individuality has deeply, irrevocably merged in the welfare of the household. Thenceforth, her sphere was circumscribed. It was her duty, her privilege, to administer the limited monarchy of that small but vitally important kingdom. If for insufficient cause she wandered from it — if for vain pleasures, or intellectual pride, she neglected her realm—she deserved reprobation as an enemy of the State—deserved to forfeit the crown of her womanhood. So it was with a heart touched

with wifely sympathy, as well as anxiety for the safety of the family ark, that she began her inquiry.

'Well, my dear, you seem to have "put on the pot," as your friend Captain Maurice says—I daresay you have good reason—but we must look out to have something left *pour tout potage* besides. You put full faith in old Jack Waters; I have heard you speak of him.'

'With hardly an exception—gentle or simple—I do not know a man whose word I would more absolutely trust, and I have known him for ten years or more.'

'You think the specimens beyond all doubt the richest you have ever seen? Remember those in the "Coming Event."'

'Yes, they were good—though nothing to these. I'm almost sorry I didn't bring them home with me. I left them in the office safe, to be quite sure.'

'You are to have a half share also, and the old man wills the whole to you, in case of accidents? That looks well.'

'I'm sure if you saw him, and them, you would think more of the affair.'

'Very likely—(thoughtfully). Now, suppose you drive in to-morrow, instead of riding, and take me to lunch with Mrs. Herbert? I can see old Waters and drop into the Bank besides. Then I'll say what I propose. I'd like to think it over—and now, it's nearly bedtime—I suppose you want to smoke?'

Mr. Banneret was a reasonable, though not an

inveterate smoker. He told himself that if ever a man needed the great sedative and composer of thought, this was one of the periods specially suggested by Fate. So he sat for nearly an hour before the fire in the dining-room, and meditatively smoked a couple of pipes of 'rough cut,' after which, his habitation being within a few miles of a populous goldfield, and not in a highly civilised and police-guarded city, he went to bed without locking a door or securing a window.

'They know there's nothing worth taking in the house of a Police Magistrate—why should they run the risk of a bullet or a gaol?' he was wont to reply, when taxed by his wife with leaving the front door or the dining-room window open; and as no one ever essayed to break through and steal during their ten years' sojourn in Barrawong, his argument apparently had force.

Since dawn he had been in Court or office for eight or nine hours—had ridden ten miles and walked five, so that when eleven o'clock came, he had done a fair day's work. As a consequence, he slept soundly until cockcrow, when he arose with a clear head and renewed faculties, ready for whatever duties might be cast upon him.

The family breakfast concluded, the boys had been despatched to school, the girls to the daily ministrations of the governess, and the infantry division duly provided for, when Mr. and Mrs. Banneret departed for Barrawong, in the buggy of the period, behind a pair of extremely useful nags, moderate as to condition, to which the grass of the field had chiefly contributed, but exceptional

as to pace and courage. They were equally good in single or double harness, in saddle also, the near-side horse carrying Mrs. Banneret, who was a daring rider, with ease and distinction, while no pair within a hundred miles could, as to road action, 'see the way they went.' So the groom phrased it. They were, in fact, the Commissioner's chief treasures and possessions. It was idle to lock up the house while these invaluable animals were left in an open paddock. Years since, when robbed by bushrangers, he had shivered in his shoes, *not* from personal apprehension, but for fear that the marauders should take a fancy to Hector, or Paris, and felt quite grateful when they only relieved him of a couple of gold watches, which he happened to have about him.

When, therefore, as the clock struck nine, Mr. and Mrs. Banneret rattled out of the front gate, at the rate of twelve miles an hour, old Hector holding up his head, and sending out his forelegs, as if he wanted to do the two hundred miles to the metropolis in forty-eight hours—the spirits of the 'leading lady' and the hero, in what might be a successful melodrama or a tragedy, as the Fates should decree, visibly rose.

'Feels like old times, doesn't it? This turn-out was new when we were married. How we used to rattle about! Now we're a dozen years older, and still "going strong," thank God! Steady, Hector! what an old Turk you are to pull!'

'Yes, my dear,' said the lady, looking softly in

his face, with an added lustre in her dark eyes—'we have not done so badly, considering we lost every penny in the world not long after that interesting event. We have known hard times, but as long as you and the children are well, and we can give them a decent education, I care for nothing. But we are going to risk nearly everything *again*, it seems to me—poor Hector and Paris too! It's a plunge, isn't it?'

'Oh, I can get a friend to buy them in, and we must live on bread and cheese, till times improve, if the shot misses. But you come in, and see Waters and his quartz before you form an opinion. Then we'll talk it out.'

It was a quarter to ten o'clock when they entered the yard of the inn, where the horses and trap were put up. Throwing the reins to the groom, and telling him to give the horses no water for half an hour, Mr. Banneret and his wife entered the hotel—in the parlour of which, reading the *Western Watchman*, that morning issued, sat Jack Waters with a serene and satisfied air. Refreshed by sleep it was wonderful what rest and refreshment had done for him. Though painfully emaciated, his eye was brighter, his colour improved—his very voice altered, as he respectfully saluted Mrs. Banneret.

'I'm afraid you've had a hard time of it, Jack, since you left last year?' she said; 'you're terribly fallen away, I can see.'

'It was "a close call," as the Yankee diggers say, ma'am! I thought I was goin' under, many a mile from here—but I never gave in, and what

with the water getting better, and the weather cooler, I pulled through. Yes, Mrs. Banneret! and it was a good day for you and the children, and the Commissioner here, as I did. If poor old Jack had dropped, in that fifty-mile dry stage—I won't say where—it mightn't have mattered much to him. It was all in the day's work—one more fool of a digger rubbed out. But to *you*, ma'am, that has always had a kind word and a bit of help for every one, and your boys and girls that's been brought up to do the same—it *will* matter to the last day of your lives. You believe me, it's God's truth, as I'm a living man this day.'

And here the miner stood up and gazed with a far-off, dreamy look, as if beyond the place in which he stood—beyond other lands and seas—as he named a desert region as yet scarce heard of, from which even the reckless prospector often turned away, the haunt of the thirst demon and the fever fiend.

'Westhampton!' said the pair simultaneously. 'Why, you don't mean to say you've been *there*! Whatever made you think of it? Why, it's thousands of miles from here.'

'I *was* there, anyhow—and now I'm back here. There was a voyage to take—I had money enough for that, and I saved as much as would take me back. I had to walk over a hundred mile to get there, and double as much to come back. What I went through, no one will ever know. But I got back to the ship. Then I started to walk from the coast, and here I am; but there wasn't much to spare, was there, Commissioner?'

'My time's up,' he replied, looking at his watch. 'Court morning, and there's always some one waiting to see me. I must go now, but you tell Mrs. Banneret all about it. She'll be in the claim too, you know'; and the man of many duties and responsibilities walked forth to receive a report from the police of a mining accident, with loss of life; to fix the date for hearing an exhaustive action for trespass; to issue warrants—sign summonses and Miners' Rights; to report upon complaints made against himself to the Secretary for Mines; to sit in a bankruptcy meeting—as also to act as general adviser, father confessor, and guardian of minors in pressing cases of the most delicate social and financial nature.

The lady's colloquy with the miner was short, but material to the issue. 'I have come in to-day,' she said, 'on purpose to see you about this speculation. Mr. Banneret believes in you, as a straight, reliable man! So do I, from what I have seen and heard. But this is a neck or nothing venture. We have little to spare as it is, and if we lose this five hundred pounds we shall be ruined—and you know that the oldest miners are deceived sometimes. It is a long way off, too.'

'If it wasn't a long way off, it wouldn't be what it is, ma'am. I've been mining these thirty year, and never see a reef like it afore. Of course it's not too late to go back on it, though I'd rather you had it than any one else I know—you helped me afore, you see, when I had my tent burnt, and I'd like to do you good.'

'How did you come to know of it?'

'Well, it was this way. You know, ma'am, us diggers often write and lay one another on to good things. An old mate of mine had been campin' out and prospectin' round there, for more'n a year, livin' hard, eatin' lizards, pigface, what not —nigh perished for want of water, until he come across this here reef. Well, he goes back to Southern Cross, where he gets laid up with rheumatic fever, and close up dies—ain't right yet. Well, he wires and lays me on, and I'm to give him an eighth share, when it's floated—as floated it will be—and for a price that'll astonish some people. I can't say more, ma'am, now, and every word of it's God's truth.'

'I think you've said enough,' said the lady, bending her gaze upon him with a searching glance, which he returned steadfastly and half wistfully. 'Whatever Mr. Banneret has promised, of course he will perform. You may trust my husband to carry it out, and I feel more satisfied now I have heard you explain matters.'

'If we can't trust the Commissioner, ma'am, we can't trust nobody—that's what all of us miners says ; there's not a man on the field that don't say the same. So I'll wish you good-bye, ma'am, and my sarvice to you.'

'Good-bye, and I hope it will bring good fortune to all of us.'

That afternoon, about half-past four o'clock, the Commissioner closed his office earlier than usual. As they were speeding along the homeward road, winding between yawning shafts and over the insecure bridges spanning the water-races, which

gurgled and bubbled beneath the horses' feet, Mrs. Banneret thus addressed her husband :

'Had a good day, my dear?'

'Very fair, all things considered. Long Small Debts Court. Big police case. Inquest on poor fellow killed in Happy Valley. Deputation from the "Great Intended"—want the base line swung. Report urgently required in the last jumping case. Got through them all except the last—they can wait a week. I must go on the ground.'

'Not a bad day's work either, for an overpaid, under-worked Civil servant, as the Radical papers call you ; and now I'll bring in *my* report, which is urgent—immediate, and can't "wait a week," whatever else can.'

'Go ahead, my dear!' said her husband, lighting his pipe, and steadying the impatient horses to a ten-mile trot. 'I'm all attention.'

'In the first place, I had a short talk with old Waters which impressed me. He thoroughly believes in the find, and I believe in *him*. So do you. If his tale is true, our fortune is made ; and though the risk is great, the speculation is no more imprudent than some we know of that ended triumphantly.'

'Of course, there was Lindsay, district Surveyor, just as hard worked and no better paid than I am, took early shares in Rocky Hill, went home with £200,000 or more! Desmond went in with the "first robbers" in Valley Gorge—came out with over £100,000. Very cautious men both of them, too. Nearly not going in. Higgleson declined—swears now, when he thinks of it.'

'Well, my dear, these are truths—stranger than fiction, as the eminent person says. Shows that all mining ventures are not swindles; and now for my proposal. You haven't had leave of absence lately?'

'Not for four years. Leave obtainable, but no visible means, if I had gone.'

'Quite so—couldn't be better put. But now the case is different. You have the five hundred pounds to come and go on—Oh! I may say here that I called at the Bank and asked Mr. Bright to show me the specimens. They made my mouth water. What necklaces and rings—pearls and diamonds I saw in the future—*if* the reef "went down," as old Waters said. How the shares would go up! That wasn't the only thing I saw. I saw schools and colleges—travel, society for the children, a house in town—a carriage (which my soul loveth),—all these I saw in those pretty white and fawn-coloured stones with their threads and veins of gold—pure gold running through and through them. Mr. Bright thinks well of the affair too, I can see.'

'Yes, he does—and he ought to be a judge. How many a ton of that same quartz, more or less auriferous, has he handled in his time! Many a pound has he lost over it too.'

'Well, we can't all win, of course; but I'm with you in this, my dear, heart and soul—and if it breaks down, and we have to live on dry bread for a couple of years, you shall never hear a whimper from me.'

'I know that, my dear. Pluck enough for

half-a-dozen men—let alone women. What about this leave? Do you mean——?'

'Of course I do; apply *at once* for three months' leave. Pressure of work, and so on. I've noticed you *do* look rather fagged now and then—though I never said so. Urgent private affairs also. Then *go with him.* You'll have the spending of the cash. He can't object to that. I'm surprised you didn't see it yourself. He might drink, or be drugged, and lose it all. Where should we be then? Depend upon it, that's the thing to do. It makes all safe, once for all.'

'I see your point. I might have thought of it, as you say; but they'll have to send a man in my place. Every one wouldn't do. However, there's sure to be some goldfields official knocking about who'd like the change. In for a penny, etc. I'll write to-night. But how will *you* get on?'

'Have your pay put into my private account while you're away. I'll manage somehow. The five hundred pounds ought to frank you there, and do all the taking up and so on—with care.'

'Yes, and careful enough we shall have to be; there'll be no more when that's gone. It's the "last chance" in every sense of the word.'

'I shall be lonely enough while you're away, my dear; but we have had to do without each other before—and must again. You'll write regularly—a letter will always cheer me up. I shan't suffer for want of employment, that's one thing.'

The Commissioner got his leave of absence on the ground of 'urgent private affairs'—which was

only just, as he had been hard at it for several years, without change or respite, in one of the most difficult, anxious, wearing occupations in the Civil Service : that of Warden, and Police Magistrate, on a large alluvial goldfield. To rule over an excitable population, varying from ten to twenty thousand; to hear and decide the interminable mining lawsuits arising from the production of tons of gold—literally *tons*, won, held, and distributed under a code of mining laws, of a sufficiently complicated nature, and appearing to the unlearned a mass of confused, contradictory regulations, was no sinecure. The amounts, too, in question were often incredibly large, so that a mistake in law, or an error in judgment, magnified by the local press, assumed gigantic proportions in the eye of the public. In the police department of jurisdiction, murders and robberies, though not alarmingly frequent, were occasionally matters of by no means a *quantité négligeable*. Excitable public meetings were common, and, as an outlet for smouldering popular feeling, answered a good purpose.

But, on the whole, Barrawong was an appointment which a gentleman with prejudices in favour of a quiet life would have found singularly unsuitable.

As for Jack, he fell in with the proposition warmly and loyally from its first mention. Distrustful, from past experience, of his will-power in the way of resistance in the grip of terrible drink temptation, to which, in the past, he had succumbed full many a time and oft, he was not

sorry to have the custody of the joint capital placed in safe hands. And yet nothing is a more astonishing psychical phenomenon than the unbroken abstention from alcohol which the intermittent drunkard will and can practise. Having so resolved, the whilom victim will sit with roystering comrades, whose full glasses pass before his face — lodge in hotels, where he sees (and smells) the soul-destroying liquid from morning to night, and under the fire of this temptation—over the grave of so many broken vows and tearful resolutions—he will remain as unshaken as a teetotaller in a coffee-house.

What a miracle it seems! What a superhuman effort must the first days of sobriety require! How does it put to shame the better born, the better instructed, whose every-day resolutions they are often so powerless to abide by!

But it is a time-bargain with the fiend, alas! in so many—in by far the majority of instances. In 'an hour that he knoweth not,' the Enemy of man asserts his power, and the victim falls—to be cast into the outer darkness of despair—of hopeless surrender—to a ruined life, an unhonoured death.

A fortnight's rest and good living set up the returned prospector to such an extent that his former comrades hardly recognised him in the neatly dressed, alert personage, who gave out that he was open to invest in a 'show,' but wasn't up to any more prospecting for a while. 'Not good enough,' and so on. Thought he'd take a trip to Melbourne to see a friend. This resolve he carried out rather

suddenly, it having been so arranged, the partners not holding it expedient that they should leave in company, or that it should be matter for general information that they were bound upon a joint mining speculation. As to the tempting local ventures, then common among all classes on a large goldfield, Mr. Banneret had always studiously abstained from the slightest connection with them.

'No!' was his uniform answer to applications of a persuasive nature—'I am here to decide upon questions of immense importance to these people over whom I am placed as a judge and a ruler. To inspire confidence in the impartiality of my decisions, I cannot be financially associated with any mining property on *this* goldfield. Say that my partner, or partners, do not come before me in any judicial matter. Such are the ramifications of mining association, that the partners, and friends of *their* partners, are certain at some time or other to be suitors in my Court. I should not then stand in the same relation to them as to perfectly unknown or detached parties to a suit. Thus I fully resolved, from my first acceptance of this office, to hold myself free from the slightest ground of suspicion.'

'As for this affair,' he told his wife, talking over the matter before his departure, 'it is entirely different; the locality is in another colony, under different laws and another government. If it comes off, I shall be indifferent to all mining law, except as it affects our particular lease—which I shall take up directly I get there.'

. . . . . .

The last farewell was said, the last embrace given. With a brave and tearless face, but an aching heart, the loyal wife bade adieu to the one man that the world held for her—stood looking after the fast-receding vehicle which was to meet the coach at the country town — waving her handkerchief till the turning-point of the road was reached, then, with falling tears, walked slowly back to the cottage, and busied herself with the never-ending needlework—over which the tears flowed so fast at times that a pause in the stitching was necessary. In her chamber she poured out her heart in fervent supplication, that he whom she loved and trusted above all other created beings might return to her, safe as to health and successful in his enterprise, if so God willed, but if otherwise, in His good Providence, let him only be spared to return in health to glad his wife's and children's eyes, and her soul would be satisfied—'Thy will, not mine be done, O Lord!' were the closing words of the heartfelt, simple petition. Rising with an expression of renewed confidence and trusting faith, she smoothed her hair, bathed her face, and with a composed and steadfast countenance betook herself to the ever-recurring duties of the household.

. . . . . .

The wrench of parting with wife and children was over. Mr. Banneret, like most strong men of an observant turn of mind, enjoyed change. A born traveller, he was equally at home on sea and land, hill or dale, plain or forest—hot or cold, wet or dry—it made no difference to him. There

was always some one, or something, to see and be interested in. His was a chiefly sympathetic constitution of mind, which could, in all literal truth, be described as irrepressible and universal.

Such being the case, he had no sooner looked up Waters, whom he found well and hearty, at the hostelry agreed upon, in Melbourne, and taken passage in the first steamer bound for far Westralia, than Hope, the day star, which had illumined so many darksome passages of his life, arose, and amid the twilight of the uncertain adventure, commenced to glow with a mild but steady irradiation. The next afternoon found them on the wave, units of a crowd, bound for the newest Eldorado.

Under instructions, an agent had arranged for the purchase of a strong, but light-running waggonette, and three horses, together with the ordinary necessaries for an overland journey through new, untried country. Reduced to their smallest weight and compass, there was still a sufficient load for the team, probably condemned to indifferent fare on the road. The selection had been careful—no one is a better judge of travel requisites than that man of many makeshifts and dire experiences, the mining prospector. The outfit needed but to be paid for, and shipped, and the first act of the melodrama began.

Voyages are much alike. They differ occasionally in length, safety, comfort, and convenience. But these are details. The chief matters are departure, and arrival in port. When the second part of the contract is unfulfilled, the performance borders on a tragedy. In this case the contract

was carried out—after a week's voyage, they duly arrived at their distant stage.

'So this is another colony,' said Mr. Banneret, looking around on the small old-fashioned town—so long settled—so sparsely populated—so meagre in tokens of civilisation, in contrast with the coast cities of the East. They were not, of course, over-fastidious. There were decent hotels—even a Club for people with introductions. To the Commissioner unstinted hospitality was tendered. He considered it, however, expedient to pitch the tent and pack their movables in the waggon : to begin to camp in earnest, as indeed they would be compelled to do during the remainder of the journey. This would be the more economical method of travelling, and the safety of their property, including the horses, would be assured.

On the morrow Waters proceeded to explain his plan of action.

They had, first of all, to travel for a week in a nor'-westerly direction, at the end of which they would reach a mining camp or township.

The track after that was fairly well marked ; but the feed was bad, or none at all—water scarce and precarious. There were all sorts of disadvantages. 'It was the worst country in Australia,' Jack said, averring that he had seen everything bad in his time. It would take them more than a month, even if they had luck. They would have to carry everything with them ; even forage for the horses. But at the end, however long and wearisome, there was a claim—a reef, the like of which he, John Waters, had never seen before.

'Then the sooner we're off the better,' said Mr. Banneret. 'We can get everything ready to-morrow, and make a short journey at any rate. The great thing is the *start*. It's mostly plain sailing afterwards.'

So the next day everything was done, fitted, and made ready for a three months' journey, as indeed it needed to be. Waiting and working at the claim would not be very dissimilar from the wayfaring—except that they would be stationary. As for the hard work, with fare to match, Mr. Banneret had had similar experiences in his youth, and believed that he could do what any other man could do, of whatever age, class, or condition.

By this time his 'mate'—a 'dividing mate,' in the eye of the law, socially and otherwise—had, as he himself expressed it, 'picked up surprisin'' —after the first week or two on the road, he would be (he stated) in hard condition again, fit to go for a man's life. Originally of the flawless constitution peculiarly the heritage of the Anglo-Saxon, and, as such, contemptuous of hardship by land or sea, nothing but his own folly had power to harm it. The wonderful recuperative power common to the race had reasserted itself—conjointly with a regular system of food and rest. The typical miner's boundless optimism and sanguine expectation bore him up as upon wings—and, as they drove along in the clear atmosphere, under a cloudless sky, the Commissioner's face lost its troubled expression.

The 'township,' when they got there, was such a one as the Commissioner had never before seen

in all his varied experiences; never in his dreams had he imagined such a mining camp. A person of restricted imagination, or feeble sympathies, might even have described the landscape as 'unspeakably desolate, and ghastly.' A certain appearance of grass, even if trodden down, and fed off by horses and bullocks, had always been visible on goldfields where he had borne rule formerly.

Here there was none, absolutely *none*. Dust of a red hue, subtly pervading all nature, was the chief elemental feature. Water was more or less available for sluicing, puddling, cradling, or other purposes connected with mining operations,—here there was *none* to be seen except in the small quantities required for partial lavation and for engine work. This last was of course procurable, but being generally salt or brackish, required to be subjected to the condenser, lest damage to the engine should ensue. In the hotels it was dearer than wine or beer in the coast cities—was always, indeed, *charged for separately* in the bars when supplied with alcohol!

'What a desert!' thought the Commissioner. 'Have we reached Arabia by any magical process? And here come the camels proper to the scene.' As he spoke, a long string of those Eastern-seeming animals came nearer, and the Afghan drivers, turbaned and with flowing garb, heightened the resemblance.

'This is a queer shop, sir,' said Waters, as he observed his companion's looks of amazement and curiosity. 'Barrawong wasn't over-pleasant, as you

might say, on a hot day, with the north wind blowin' the dust in your eyes—but it was a king to this ; and then the river—you could allers have a swim ; and nothing freshens a man up like a good header into cool, deep water after his day's work.'

'It certainly is not a place a man would pick to spend his honeymoon—though I suppose some adventurous couples have done that ; but, of course, the main thing is the gold. Men didn't come out here to hunt for scenery, or farm-lands. Are they on good gold? If they are, all the rest will follow.'

'Well, sir, this is the richest goldfield in Australia, just now, and likely to be the biggest. *You* know, if that keeps on, they'll get everything else they want, and more too, directly ; but we shan't stop here long enough to think about it, hot or cold,' said Waters. 'I'll watch the horses to-night, for there's a lot of cross coves about, who'd steal the teeth out of your head if you slept sound enough. We'd better load up all we'll want for a month or two, and get away afore sundown to-morrer. You might write out a list of things we'll want. I'll mind the camp till you come back.' This being arranged, Banneret went into town after a frugal lunch, and walked down the main street, which, with a few others crossing it at right angles, constituted the nucleus of the infant city. A few large and fairly well kept hotels, with ornamental bars and spacious billiard and dining rooms, accommodated the floating population, of whom the greater number took their meals there, in preference to undergoing

the doubtful experiment of housekeeping. The expense was considerable; but those who had shares in dividend-paying mines could well afford war prices, while to those making short visits to this and other 'fields'—partly on business, and partly for curiosity—a few pounds could make but slight difference. Of course, the township bore a family likeness to all other mining centres,—one long main street, with others branching off at right angles, the frontage to which was filled with cabins, huts, cottages, tents, of every size, shape, and colour. The roofs were chiefly of corrugated iron, which, unsightly as a building material, yet enabled the possessor to collect rain-water. When the walls, or rather sides, were not of the same material they were of hessian—of slabs, or weatherboard. Some indeed were of bark—the climate being consistently hot and dry. The nights, however, were cool, as the goldfield stood fairly high above sea-level. When it did rain, it came down with tropical force and volume, as was seen by the depth of the ravines. But this state of matters occurred too rarely to occasion serious thought. Here and there tiny gardens, wherein grew a few carefully tended vegetables and flowers, showed that the soil was not wholly barren. The pepper tree (*Schinus molle*), friend of the pioneer horticulturist, had already made a lodgment, as well as the Kurrajong or Cooramin (*Sterculia*), the slow growth of which, however, few of the present population would remain to witness.

All purchases made, the team fed and rested, the loading arranged as only the experienced

overlander knows how, and supper over, a start was made by the light of a rising moon.

'We take this track, sir,' said Waters. 'It's the main road to the "twenty-mile soak," and give out as we're goin' to Kurnalpi. There's whips o' tracks for ten or twelve mile; and then we strike due west. If any of 'em follers us up, we can say we're makin' for Kimberley—that'll choke 'em off, if anything will.'

'I suppose there are men on these fields that will track up prospectors if they believe they've made a find?'

'In course there are, sir. Chaps as like pickin' up the fruits of other men's work, and ain't game to tackle the hardships theirselves.'

So the strangely constituted companions journeyed on, by the faint wavering light of the struggling moon, sometimes obscured, but generally available, as the track, so far, was across open plains or downs, sandy, gravelly, or rock-strewn by turns, but offering no serious obstacle to the passage of horse or man. What timber there was consisted chiefly of scrub and brushwood, mulga or mallee. Some of it was available for camel food; but, in a general way, it appeared to the Commissioner as a land accursed of God and man—unfitted for providing sustenance for man or beast.

As the night dragged through, he could not but consider the contrast between his present position and that which he had abandoned in order to follow what might be a delusive phantom, a 'Will-o'-the-wisp'—an 'ignis fatuus,' specially provided for leading astray wayfarers,

blinded by the 'auri sacra fames.' Suppose he lost his way, broke down in health or eyesight—the most vulnerable point in the explorer's armoury? Waters was old, and though apparently strong, and inured to hardship, could not go on for ever, or if he missed his way to the Waterloo Spring?—they were far apart and the aboriginal natives were indifferent or hostile—in any case, averse, from their standpoint, to point out or conduct the party to the inestimable water-store. What might be his fate? And what — still more harrowing thought—the condition of his wife and family, deprived of his protecting care, and having exhausted his slender store of earnings—the fruit of many an hour of toil and self-denial? He had reached the point of almost intolerable doubt and distress of mind when a cheery shout from his companion, who held the reins, dislodged the nightmare which he had conjured up.

'Yes, Captain, yonder's the Black Peak! I was pretty near told out when I struck it, and that done when I got there that I never expected to see home again. I'd been walking half the night, and all day—my water-bag was empty—I'd had nothing to eat to speak of for a week past, just a morsel of biscuit now and then. My boots was wore through, my feet bleedin', and that sore I could hardly drag myself along. By George! if a digger wants to have the heart of a lion, as people say, what must a prospector? Heat and cold, hunger and thirst—blacks to fight, off and on—whites if he's got a bit of gold, nigh hand as bad, perhaps worse, as they're more cunning.

How many a heap of bones lies bleaching in the sun, between here and Kurnalpi! Sometimes they're found, and there's papers on 'em that tells where the only son, or the favourite youngest one, laid down to die, and never come home, all the years they was expecting of him to open the door of the old place and say, "Here I am, with a brown face and a bag of nuggets"—as the story-writers tell us. Well, well! I'm ramblin' away, just like a chap I *did* hear once, as I come on just in time to give him a bite and a sup, and save his precious life. How he was a-talkin' and goin' on! I heard him a matter of half a mile afore I got to him. He talked and talked—thought he saw his people again, and they wouldn't let him in. Then he'd scream and yell, and curse frightful, and say the devil was coming for him—just for all the world like a man with the jim-jams—the D.T.s, or whatever doctors call it. There ain't so much difference between what men and women say when once they're off their head. We're all queer animals—larned or unlarned—and that's a fact.

'And now, sir, as I've talked enough rot for a while, only I thought you was lookin' rather down on it, and it might liven you up a bit, I see we're on a bit of good saltbush where we can stop and give the horses a feed. I'll fry a bit of the mutton for a relish, and make a pot of tea. There's a plenty of the damper left as I baked a while back. We can take it easy while you have a "bange." I'll watch the nags, in case any one comes along. We can push on afterwards. Anyhow the horses will be all the better for a spell.'

Waters bustled about, unharnessing and hobbling the horses, which immediately began to nibble the saline bushes that seemed to have found a patch of congenial soil. Walking down a small gully or shallow ravine, he was fortunate enough to discover a tiny 'soak' under a rock, being directed thereto by a brace of the beautiful bronze-wing pigeons. These birds will fly great distances to a spring or water-hole of any sort, but are difficult to shoot, as their habit is to drink rapidly, and fly back to their haunts so suddenly that it is a case of snap-shot, or too late.

The soak proved sufficient to give the team a drink, and also to fill up the ten-gallon keg, which was kept as a reserve in case of need.

After this halt Mr. Banneret felt easier in his mind, and more sanguine as to the results of the expedition.

The sky was cloudless, of course. The desert sun had shone its fiercest for the last two hours. The pocket thermometer and aneroid registered 90 degrees. Before the close of day it would probably reach 105 or 110.

'We'll not start till after sundown, sir,' said the practical partner. 'I want to blind our trail a bit, so as we shan't be follered up just yet. By gum! if this ain't the very identical mob o' horses come a purpose, like as if it was ordered. See them camels?'

'Yes! what a string of them, with Afghan drivers. What have they to do with us?'

'You'll find out, sir, soon's they come a bit closer.'

It may not be generally known that horses have an insuperable dread of camels when first seen. It is on record that, on the first progress of an explorer's expedition down the Darling River, the station horses with one accord fled from the river frontage, stampeding towards the 'back blocks,' and were recovered with difficulty days and weeks afterwards.

On this occasion, there happened to be an overland mob (drove) of horses on their way to the Southern Cross goldfield—coming in a different direction from that of the travellers. Directly they caught sight of the camel train, they swung across the road, and headed apparently for Coongarrie, in spite of the utmost efforts of the drivers, who by cries, yells, and stockwhip cracks, strove to stop or wheel them. 'That's all right for us, sir,' said Waters, who, after several perfunctory efforts to assist the men in charge, was content to let them go their own way. 'We'll be off as soon as we can harness up, sir, and drive along the way they've gone. They've made tracks enough to cover ours ten times over. Next day we'll hit out due north, where the ground's that bloomin' hard and rocky as it won't hold a track—unless they had a nigger with them, which it's not likely—not hereabouts, anyway.

As they drove quietly along in the line of the flying squadron, it really appeared as if circumstance had aided them in an unforeseen but perfectly effectual manner. Some miles farther on they met the runaway mob, considerably steadied by their escapade, being driven quietly back, with

a man in front of them, who was keeping closely to their track, as in the outward run.

'That makes it just right for us, sir,' said the old man; 'they'll knock out the track of our wheels, for good and all, so that no man can tell where we left the main trail—and they've twisted, and twisted so, as any feller that's trackin' us up won't have any show of hittin' our dart, any more'n a mob of kangaroos.'

Both partners knew enough of the working of claims on new goldfields to judge how essential it was to their success that they should be able to take possession, undisturbed by the tumult and confusion of a rush on new ground, known or reported to be rich. Wild exaggerations, and rumours of Aladdin's caves, would pass from camp to camp, with every fresh arrival of miners. The Commissioner had seen before the lonely creek flat, or fern-fringed gully, converted within forty-eight hours into a populous township, with main street, shops, hotels, billiard-rooms, more or less effective for their needs; while every acre for miles around the reef or alluvial deposit was pegged out and jealously guarded by armed men, whom it needed but little imagination to believe capable of shedding blood in defence of their legal or fancied rights.

He now began to comprehend that their present action was decided by an experienced and capable coadjutor, and resolved to continue in the position of sleeping partner until circumstances demanded a change.

Many days and nights were passed in desert travelling, in more or less monotonous fashion.

The days were hot—almost intolerably so; the sand and gravel of the soil, unrelieved by pasture, even of the humblest description, seemed to burn the very soles of their boots. What then would happen if they were attacked by the dreaded ophthalmia, the 'sandy blight' of the colonists, he shuddered to think of. He had known of terrible experiences when the sufferers were far from medical aid, so of course had brought the accepted tinctures with them, had invested in 'solar topees' and sunshades—that is to say, *he* had; but his companion, with the reckless indifference of the average miner to every kind of danger, trusted to chance and a hitherto unbroken constitution. 'That fever pretty nigh knocked me out, sir—I *was* bad when you seen me in Barrawong. But it was the starvation and it together that near settled me. I won't cut it so fine again, believe me.' This statement was made at the close of the day—when the final journey was commenced. The nights, Banneret was glad to remark, were fairly cool, and free from the mosquito pest, the elevation above the sea being greater than would be at first conjectured.

'We strike an old camel track,' said his companion, after they were fairly started; 'it was made just after the Kurnalpi field broke out. They don't take that line now, and just as well. It's wonderful how they missed our "bonanza," but that's what you'll notice on every field—they'll go washin' and cradlin' in every gully *but* the right 'un, and almost break their shins over the real thing without ever knowin' it.'

The dawn was painting the pale east with gold streaks and crimson patches as they broke camp and headed for a peak, of which the irregular outline stood in sharp relief against the glowing sky. They had quitted the camel-track, obscured in places by the blown sand and occasional storm showers, and now struck boldly across the limitless plain. Their landmark was distinct, and encouraging, as relieving them from anxiety about the route. As the Commissioner gazed upon the bold outline of the fantastic peak, one thought possessed his mind, dominating all others. Here was the goal of his ambition: the secret hope which had during long years of struggle and self-denial kept alive the prospect of eventual prosperity, such as should comprehend peace of mind, in a well-ordered country home near the metropolis, education of the children, social privileges, with a modest allowance of travel and art culture, and generally unrestricted rational enjoyment. Would this mysterious mountain lead them to a veritable Sinbad's valley of diamonds, or would the fairy gold, by virtue of the magical transmutation which seems connected with rich deposits of the precious metals, be for them rendered illusionary and disappointing? Would they find the sacred spot already captured and despoiled; desecrated by alien pegs, and filled with defiant claimants? He knew the keenness with which a prospector's track could be followed up—by men versed in the lore of the wilderness—the outcome of those who, like his guide and partner, 'had done a perish,' in goldfields argot,

not less hazardous than he ; their safety, their very existence, dependent upon such a hazard—a mere cast of the die, as might be this. It grew, this dark surmise, raged and traversed his brain, increasing in force and virulence, until he almost imagined that he saw in the dim distance the outline of a tent, the form of a man, the thin thread of smoke which goes up from a tiny desert fire, such as, God in Heaven! he remembered noting so well of old. It was a trick of the imagination doubtless. Was he indeed becoming lightheaded ? Was distemper of the brain setting in ? He was wont to regard himself as a level-headed person, cool in emergency, steadfast to bear untoward circumstance. He would wait, and divert his thoughts for a while. He would drive out one frame of mind by compelling another—several other imagined states of mind to take its place. He thought then, at first resolutely—then as the picture became more clear and vivid, of the happy day of his arrival—by coach, of course : they had quitted the train at midnight, and taken their seats, secured by telegram, in the well-horsed, well-lighted, punctual conveyance of Cobb and Co., which has earned so many a blessing from home-returning travellers. The long night was past ; the dawn discovered the well-known goldfields road, from which in half an hour—ye gods! but half an hour !—the main street of the old familiar township, with its improvised banks, stores, shops, and hotels, would burst upon the view. Ha! well—I have been dreaming to some purpose. The vision fades. Let us hope that the hill will

not suffer the fate of 'Poor Susan's,' in those exquisite lines of the poet. Yes! it stands there, clear, neutral-tinted—nude—frowning, as doubtless it has done for centuries, æons, if you will—since the central fires lifted it from the womb of Dame Hertha. The day is older, but the unclouded sky and the atmosphere are of such clearness that distant objects can be discerned with almost perfect certainty; he is awake and alert now, if ever—his senses have *not* played him false—there *is* a tent, at no very great distance, and sitting by it, on a box, is a man smoking, while another appears to be putting together articles of camp furniture.

CHAPTER III

APPARENTLY at the same moment the guide, who is walking ahead as usual, has made up his mind as to the apparition, for he halts and walks back to the cart.

'What the deuce is that? Who do you think they are?'

'Well, sir, they're a couple of "travellers," on the same lay as ourselves—far as I can make out. They've no horse, nor cart—so they've been goin' slow, naturally. They've not found our show, or they'd 'a stopped on it—or be makin' back to raise an outfit. I can't quite make out whether they're goin' on to the hill, or just on the turn-back for want of grub. We'd better act cautious with them after seein' who they are.'

'We ought to go over to them?'

'That's my idee, sir. If we head for the mountain, they'll be sure to foller us up, thinkin' we've reasons for it. It's too late to pretend to go back. They've seen we *were* headin' for the hill, anyway, and it won't bluff 'em if we turn round, besides losin' time.'

'I agree with you,' said the Commissioner.

'Put the saddle on the leader; I'll ride over and talk to them.'

'All right, sir; if they're men to be trusted we can take 'em in as mates. We can't hold a Reward Claim, or leastways work it, with only our two selves. There's enough for all, if we can only get to work.'

The leading horse was saddled. On riding over to the camp of the wayfarers, the Commissioner was at once struck by its peculiar appearance. The articles scattered about the door of the bell tent were certainly not those of the ordinary miner. The towels were of better than usual quality; the bath sponges, arranged for drying, were larger than usual—other articles of the toilet similarly distinctive.

'Pleased to see you, sir!' said one of the young men, with a clear British accent. ''Fraid we can't offer you much in the way of refreshment. Point of fact we've had nothing to eat for the last forty-eight hours but dried apples—they're not so bad when they've been well soaked.'

'Don't exaggerate, Denzil!' said his companion. 'They're just a trifle better than stewed boots, if you ask me. But we're alive, which is something—though how long we shall last out is a very, very doubtful question.'

'Permit me to introduce myself as Arnold Banneret. My mate and I are travelling due north, unless we strike something attractive.'

'Just our case,' said the elder of the two young men—they were neither of them far from the legal standard of manhood—'except that we're

travelling due south—isn't it south, Denzil? I'm not much of a geographical chap, but we're going back to Coolgardie—if we can get there. Sorry we can't join forces—awfully so; give you my word.'

The Commissioner gazed searchingly at the strangers. Accustomed to reading faces—and in circumstances where a mistake might have cost him dear, he had often been forced to act upon a hasty summing-up of presumed character. He did so in this instance. 'Swells out of luck,' was his unspoken verdict. 'Temporarily, of course. The dark one has the face, the bold and steady look, of a born explorer. He'll go far yet. The other boy is the well-bred youth of the day, with little experience but that of Oxford or Cambridge. Athletics are chiefly in his line. But they are men as well as gentlemen, I'm convinced.'

'Our acquaintance has been short,' he said, 'but may develop later on. As I have a proposal to make, may I ask whom I have the pleasure of addressing?'

'My friend's name is Southwater. My own name Newstead,' said the 'traveller.' 'As you say, we haven't seen each other before, but are quite ready to consider any offer that it suits you to make.' His friend nodded assent. 'From present appearances the advantage seems likely to be entirely on our side.'

'We shall see,' said the Commissioner; 'probably it may be mutual. In the meanwhile, will you come over and take breakfast with me? I'll go

on ahead and speak to my mate.' And he cantered off.

The young men lost no time in collecting their property, and arranging it into the 'swags' of the period, with a celerity to be acquired only by experience.

'This *is* a throw-in!' said the younger man to his friend. 'I wonder who our distinguished stranger is? There was a note of authority in his manner, though nothing could be more courteous than his bearing. Looks like an army man—though we can't be certain. But I'll swear he's held a command somewhere. At any rate we are sure of getting something to eat. People with a waggonette always have a stock of provisions which we poor swagmen can't rival.'

'Swagmen, indeed!' laughed his friend. 'I wonder what the girls at Brancepeth or Aunt Eleanora would think if they saw us now?'

'Why, of course, that they always knew it would come to this. Probably turn bushrangers before we'd done. At any rate we're not likely to be robbed. *Cantabit vacuus*—eh?'

On reaching the waggonette they found the regulation meal laid out upon a board supported by tressels, a portable affair such as surveyors carry. People living much in tents are ingenious in contrivances for comfort. There were also camp-stools, equally light and effective. Corned beef and damper, with tin plates, were set out, while the inevitable 'billy' was boiling near a small but hot fire.

'This is John Waters, my partner, gentlemen,'

said their entertainer; 'as a miner of experience I guarantee him.' Here old Jack shook hands solemnly with the new arrivals, while regarding them with fixed and scrutinising eye. 'You will find him a "white man" in the best sense of the word. After lunch I shall be happy to talk business. Allow me to help you to this excellent corned beef.'

'Thanks awfully; we shan't be long, I assure you—we've not had a square meal since we left Coolgardie. You mustn't mind if we seem greedy. As for me, I'm ravenous, but still capable of self-restraint.'

'Fellows grumble at a tough steak at home,' said Southwater; 'talk about having no appetite till 8 P.M. I wonder what they would say to camp fare in Australian deserts? Lucky we didn't fall across any blacks, or roast picaninny would have suggested itself.'

The meal concluded, at which the strangers did not, in spite of their confession, exhibit extraordinary eagerness, their entertainer lit his pipe and commenced the conference. 'I was doubtful lest our interests might be antagonistic,' said he, 'but we meet now on a different footing.'

'We should have started back to Coolgardie in half an hour,' said Mr. Newstead. 'Denzil and I were played out, and had resolved on turning back in preference to leaving our bones to bleach by the wayside. Your appearance decided us to reconsider. I take it you have a "show" farther on?'

'That is the precise state of the case. Here is

the prospector who discovered our bonanza, and will explain.'

'Best reef I ever seen,' interposed the grizzled veteran—'and I'm a "forty-niner." So that says somethin'. If no one's dropped across my cache (as the trappers say) there's enough to make all our fortunes twice over. We can be t'other side of that there hill inside of twelve hours.'

'Shortly. You understand enough of mining law, I presume, to see that though we can take up a Reward Claim, we can't work it with two men. I see by your hands—excuse me—that the manual part of mining is not unknown to you. We *must* take in some one. I prefer, and so does Jack, to work with gentlemen, so I'm prepared to offer you such shares as may be further agreed between us when the allocation takes place.'

'It sounds too good to be true,' said Newstead. 'You are not going to lure us into a cavern and slay us for our property, are you? But one can't help regarding oneself as the modernest Aladdin. In any case, I say, done with you, magician or no! and so does Denzil, if I know him. Allow me to help pack, and follow, as Dick Burton used to write to his wife—the pay portion of the injunction must await developments.'

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The journey was resumed, the saddle was removed from the leader's back, and placed in the waggonette, as were also the effects of the new associates. Apparently willing workers, they proved themselves cheery and entertaining companions.

Unaffected in manner and simple of speech, it was yet apparent, though they conversed on perfectly equal terms with old Jack as with the Commissioner, that they had moved in the *haute volée* of English society.

They made no statement to that effect, but it was indirectly plain to the Commissioner, himself an aristocrat by birth and social surroundings, that such was the case. It was many a year since he had been 'home,' yet, nevertheless, the merry chatter of these youngsters, which, though careless, was redolent of the best English 'form,' was refreshing in the life of a man who, though long absent from the old country, was yet in full sympathy with her ideas and traditions. So they fared on for the long remaining hours of the day, until they reached the spinifex flat, immediately adjacent to the base of the hill which had been so long within sight, but without reaching the gradually ascending 'rise' which led to a plateau slightly above the level of the plain. Here they halted—to feed the horses and await the rising of the moon—after which the journey would recommence.

'We can't afford to take no risks,' said the old man; 'we might have another party comin' along from "the Cross" way. And if they got there first—some men's that smart, you'd a'most swear as they could smell the gold—there'd be a barney over it; and law, likely as not, which you never know how it might turn out. So I'm thinkin' it's best to go on, and collar right away—that'll put an end to all bother in one act.'

As the other members of the party were, more or less, excited and ardent with the thought that the tedious journey was nearly at an end, with fame and fortune almost within their grasp (for when is fortune achieved without fame following dutifully behind the triumphal car?)—the Commissioner, with the far-off cottage ready to be illumined with the glad tidings, and the children's shouts almost in his ears; the young men, fired with the idea of a return to England with a record rivalling that of the hero who 'broke the bank at Monte Carlo,'—no objection was raised. And when the moon, nearly at her full, rose slowly over the horizon, commencing to flood the wide bare solitudes, the plain, the hill crags, the mighty sweep of waterless silent landscape, and deserted save for themselves, it seemed a weird mockery to expect anything of the nature of wealth won from a region so far removed from the benevolence of Nature or of man.

Leaving one of the 'jackeroos' (as the old man called them, apologising, however, and explaining the term) to take charge of the waggonette, the others followed the prospector for a few hundred yards until, as they came to a spot where a few stones had been carelessly thrown together, he stopped, and pointed to a stake. 'There it is!' he gasped; 'no one's been next or anigh it. I'll go round, sir, with you and see the other ones. If Mr. Southwater'll go back to the cart, and feed the horses, and start a fire to boil the billy, we'll make sure that nothing's been touched since I left here months ago. It's not far from daylight, and

after a bit of breakfast we can open up the reef, and you'll see what sort of a show it is.'

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'Well, this is something what we went into the wilderness to see—not to be profane—but isn't it exactly what one would have thought in the old, old days? This *is* a wilderness, and no mistake. I used to wonder what one was like when I was at school. Now I know.'

'Wild and bare, and open to the air,' continued Mr. Newstead. 'It takes a lot of imagination to think of villages, towns, cities, and so on—"in this neglected spot," as Gray's *Elegy* hath it. But *gold* rules the court, the camp, the grove, rather more strongly than t'other imperial power. Everything else follows in its train, so they tell me—Denzil and I are too young to lay down the law on these great subjects. We'll live and learn, I surmise, as our American friend said.'

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The stakes had been duly cut, sharpened, and driven in, as far as the rocky nature of the hill permitted. There was no path or track to the wondrous spot itself. The faint footsteps of a weak, overwrought, famished man left no imprint upon rock or sand.

An aboriginal tracker on the man-hunt for foe or felon might have read, from a displaced pebble, a bent or broken twig, a deeper indent from a stumbling boot, that a white man had passed that way, but no senses less keen than those of the desert roamer could have followed the tokens of travel.

'I'd been in an' out them upper gulches,' said

Jack, reminiscent of Californian digger talk, 'and what with bein' tol'ble used up when I come, and dead beat afterwards, was just about stumblin' downhill again when I spots this here openin'. It's the last chance, thinks I, but I'd better prospect the lot afore I give in. And this is what I come on afore I'd been ten minutes at work. Reg'lar jeweller's shop, and no mistake.' While he was talking, his hands were not idle: he had brought a pick and shovel from the waggonette, and after shovelling back the rock and earth from the tiny shaft, commenced to break down the 'cap' of the reef. This was almost incredibly rich. The rock appeared to be (as the Commissioner said) half gold—indeed, in some of the specimens there was more gold than quartz.

Strings of the precious metal hung down, which, indeed, seemed to loosely unite fragments of the dull, cloud-coloured quartz—so dear to the miner's soul—while here and there were 'nuggets'—actual lumps of the gold. 'This one's not short of fifty ounces,' said he, lifting one of four or five pounds' weight. 'And there's bigger ones to come, I'll go bail.'

'I've always doubted,' said Newstead, 'whether my relations believed my statements about rich finds in Australia. Certainly my banking account was not such as to inspire credence. But I shall pour contempt on their incredulity after this display.'

'I should think so,' said Mr. Banneret. 'And now we must have a council of war. What do you say about the next move, Jack?'

'I vote we dolly all the gold as we can get out of the picked stone. Then, in course, the mine'll have to be registered, and a company floated on the strength of these here specimens. It won't take long to do that once they get to Melbourne. The Commissioner and Mr. Newstead can go back to Coolgardie with the team and waggonette, leaving us enough to go on with. There's a "soak" not far off, and we can fill the ten-gallon keg afore they leave. A team can be sent up with all the things we want. Mr. Southwater and I'll work on the "stope," if he's agreeable—feeling along the reef as we go, like. And now I'm beginning to think about summat to eat.'

The adjournment was carried *nem. con.* When they reached the camp Mr. Southwater had got everything in fine order. He was pleased with the idea of having to stop behind, as old Jack had told him that he was a born bushman, and would make a first-class prospector some day. Mr. Banneret said little, but, looking at the bold expression and steady eye of the young Englishman, was fully of opinion that he was destined to be a leader of men.

Next week the Commissioner and Newstead started back on the homeward track, taking with them five thousand ounces of gold and specimens. There was a good deal of business to be done, as he reflected, when they reached civilisation. A Report in terms provided for by the Goldfields Act and Regulations had to be made to the Commissioner of the district, as well as a Lease to be applied for; a deposit in cash paid to the Mining

Registrar; a Prospecting Area had been pegged out, and must be registered, and the whole auriferous area would be floated as a company, with a hundred thousand shares of 20s. each. Machinery for a quartz mill with fifty stamps and all the newest improvements, Diehl process, etc., had to be purchased and forwarded by team at once, and provisions, tools, extra tents, bedding, books, cooking utensils—in fact, everything necessary for a large staff; with engineer, manager, metallurgist, wages men, shift-bosses, and others—the numbers in such case amounting to hardly less than fifty men to begin with. The unpretending vehicle carried a considerable amount of treasure, tempting enough to outlaws sure to be included in every goldfields rush. But both men were well armed, and not likely to surrender without a desperate struggle; the chances of an ambush were small—the open, waterless nature of the country being against such a mode of attack. Many thousand ounces of gold were indeed carried on horseback, or in the unpretending buggy of the period, without much knowledge of the same being noised abroad. Their journey to Coolgardie, and afterwards to Perth, was, in this instance, wholly devoid of incident, and Mr. Banneret had the satisfaction of banking his precious cargo without any but the officials of the institution being aware of the nature of the transaction.

The only incident of note which bordered upon risk occurred during an enforced stoppage at a stage a few miles distant from Perth. Here a large detachment of navvies had just been set down,

and apparently they had managed to possess themselves of more beer than was good for them. They were consequently in a state of humorous, if not aggressive excitement. This displayed itself in curious inquiry as to the contents of the portmanteau over which such jealous guard was kept. Both men were dressed in ordinary miner's costume, and therefore lacked the prestige which in Australia ensures respect for all men presumably of the rank of 'gentleman.' However, a miner who had been at Barrawong just before the 'breaking out' of the West Australian goldfields, happened to arrive in a waggonette. He and his mate were 'going east,' in order to float a company for the working of a mine, which they had discovered, and declared to be of great promise. The man from Barrawong was affected almost to tears by the sight of the Commissioner, that dread and august potentate, in working man's garb. He looked as if he wished to fall down and worship him. But, introducing his mate, he said, with a choking voice :

'Bill, this here's our Commissioner, same as I told yer of, when I was on Barrawong ; he's struck it rich, he tells me, and as we're on the road to Perth, he'll be obliged to us for a lift in our waggonette if you're agreeable.'

'I've heard of Commissioner Banneret,' said the mate, making what he imagined to be a bow suitable to the occasion, 'and he should have my seat if I had to walk every bloomin' step of the road to the coast.'

'There isn't a man as was on the field when I

left,' responded the mate, 'that wouldn't do the same; but there's no call for any of us to walk—the horses are in good fettle, considerin' the price of feed, and they'll take the four on us—not leavin' the portmanter behind—into Perth, flyin'.'

This settled the matter. The portmanteau, so curiously regarded, was promptly lifted into the waggonette, and, as well as the Commissioner, was driven briskly along the road to the city, Mr. Newstead being left with the baggage of the expedition to follow at his leisure, and rejoin his chief at the township. That gentleman lost no time after being dropped at the Bank of Barataria. The mineral collection was produced.

'What name shall I enter?' said the young banker at the counter. 'Gold and specimens, how many ounces?'

'Seven thousand four hundred and twenty-three, seventeen pennyweights, and ten grains.'

'Oh!' said the bank clerk, with an instant change of manner. 'You're Mr. Banneret! Very glad to see you, sir! The Bank had advice of your expected arrival. I'll take the weights, and give you a receipt directly. Won't keep you waiting.'

'Well, good-bye, Captain!' said the miner from Barrawong. 'You're all right now. Anything more we can do for you—drive you anywheres? Say the word.'

'No; thanks very much! As it's early yet, I'll take a stroll round the town until Mr. Newstead comes up. It's a little different from New South Wales, eh?'

'It is that, sir. I suppose you couldn't lay us on to the spot where that show come from?'

'Hum! it won't be long before we're tracked up, I daresay. I don't see why you shouldn't have a chance as well as another. What is the leading hotel here, Mr. Carter?'—this to the bank clerk.

'Oh, "The Palace." It's that two-storeyed place at the corner of the street. Clean, and the cookery fair. The Mining Registrar's office is next door.'

CHAPTER IV

'THANKS very much. Perhaps you'll dine with me to-night. One of my partners is coming along, who will be pleased to make your acquaintance. We'll drive over, Con. Now then,' he continued, after they had trotted a short distance along the dusty street, 'The "Last Chance," as you have seen, is one of the richest claims in Australia. All the vacant ground within miles of it will be rushed in a week. Would you and your mate like to register four men's ground on No. 1, north of the Reward Claim — on half shares? There's plenty for all.'

'All right, sir. We've got our Miners' Rights all square and regular—and glad of the offer. I know a couple more chaps here—old mates that'll go in with us, so as to make up the claim. You know Murphy, and Crowley, don't you, sir? They'll come, quick and lively. Good men to work, too.' The next step was taken without delay. It was legally necessary to register the Prospecting Area—to take out Miners' Rights—to apply for a lease. They were entitled under Regulation No. 15 of the Goldfields Act of 189– to twelve acres, in the shape of a rectangular paral-

lelogram. These matters rendered it necessary to remain for the day at Swantown, so Mr. Banneret surrendered himself to the inevitable without much uneasiness. He took rooms for himself and partner at the hotel called 'Palace'—large and fairly commodious, though by no means so much so as in the stage to which the city was destined to develop. He expected Newstead to arrive about lunch-time, and philosophically set off on a tour of inspection.

That this was destined to be the centre of the largest, richest goldfield in Australia, his experience enabled him to decide. From all directions prospecting parties were converging — immediately reporting themselves at the Bank. There was but one, at present. The shops and stores were much the same as those on every promising goldfield, perhaps more comprehensive and high-priced. The surroundings were, however, distinctly suggestive of a dry country in a dry season.

For rain *does* come to these 'habitations in sicco,' though chiefly with reluctance and economy. The animals for team and burden were half-starved, sometimes emaciated to a degree. The strings of camels, with their turbaned Afghan drivers, were strangely foreign to his unaccustomed eyes. They stood patient, and uncomplaining, before the larger stores, or arrived laden with wool from the more distant stations, which, owing to the dry season, were unable to forward their fleeces, or obtain supplies without the aid of the 'ship of the desert.' There he stood, huge, ungainly, unpopular with

the teamsters, terrifying to their horses—and all others.

Sullenly regarded by the white labourers as alien to their country and their trade, it yet could not be denied that here, at least, was the right burden-bearer in the right place—in spite of his queer temper, his general unpleasantness, and his incongruous appearance in this twentieth-century Australia, utterly, manifestly indispensable, as he had been in the long-past ages when 'the famine was sore in the land.'

Mr. Banneret having a taste for exploring, and being also a practised pedestrian, took a longish walk around the outskirts of the town, before returning to the hotel and taking his seat at the dinner-table. This was a long, substantial piece of furniture, amply supplied with materials for a meal of the same character. All sorts and conditions of men were there represented: aristocratic tourists, on the look-out for mining investments — directors, or managers of syndicates, companies, exploring parties, mercantile partnerships, what not. All were animated by the common attraction, most successful of all baits with which to ensnare the soul of man, from the dawn of history. Recruits for the great army of industry, from all lands, of all colours, castes, and conditions — the coach-driver, the teamster, the newly arrived emigrant, the army deserter, the runaway sailor, the stock-rider, the navvy, the shepherd,—all men were free and equal at the Palace Hotel, so long as they could pay for bed and board. Nor was there

observable any objectionable roughness of tone or manner, in a company formed of such heterogeneous elements.

It is surprising to the 'observer of human nature' how the higher tone seems instinctively adopted by the mass, when leavened with gentlefolk, though they may have been wholly unused to its rules and limitations in earlier life.

To Arnold Banneret this was nothing new. Accustomed in his official journeyings to mix occasionally, though not, of course, habitually, with all classes of Australian workers, he knew —no man better—that, given a courteous and unpretending manner, no gentleman, in the true sense of the word, need fear annoyance or disrespect in the remote 'back block' region, or the recent goldfield 'rush.' It had leaked out that he had 'come in' from a find of more than ordinary value, the locality of which was deeply interesting to everybody. But the unwritten code of mining etiquette prevented direct questioning. They knew, these keen-eyed prospectors and workers on so many a field, that the necessary information would soon disclose itself, so to speak, and that the last who followed the tracks of the earlier searchers would have as good a chance of success as the first.

Having satisfied his appetite, a fairly keen one, he betook himself to his bedroom, and wrote at length to his wife, detailing all progress since his last letter, and finishing up with this exceptional statement: 'This journey has, of course, not been without a certain share of inconvenience,

and what some people might call hardship. But you know that such wayfaring is in the nature of holiday-making for me. It was, of course, a hazardous adventure, inasmuch as all our small reserve of capital was embarked. A miscalculation would have been wreck, and almost total loss: would have taken years of painful saving and rigid self-denial to have made up the deficit. But now success, phenomenal, assured, has more than justified the risk, the apparent imprudence, everything. Our fortune is made! as the phrase goes; think of that! When the company is floated, the shares allotted, the machinery on the road to Perth, a hundred thousand pounds will be the lowest valuation at which our half share in the "Last Chance" can be calculated. A hundred thousand pounds! Think of that! Of what it means for you, for me, for the children. For everybody concerned. And a good many people will be concerned beneficially in the venture as soon as the money is paid to my account in the Bank of New Holland.

'I don't intend that there shall be any risk or uncertainty in the future—apart from those apparently accidental occurrences from which, under God's providence, no man is free. But I will invest fifty thousand pounds in debentures, well secured; so that, come what will, a comfortable home, a sufficing income, will always be assured to you and the children. Of course I shall resign my appointment as soon as I return, giving the Government all proper notice. Our future home will be in Sydney or Melbourne, on whichever we

may decide. The children are just at the age when higher educational facilities are required. They have not done badly so far. But they are growing up fast, and upon what they assimilate, intellectually, for the next few years will their social success largely depend.

'It is needless to dilate upon the endless pleasures and the general advantages of the possession of ample means, now, for the first time in our lives, enjoyed, or about to be provided for us, *before* the fruition is accomplished. I have always been averse to a too sanguine appropriation of the probable treasure. Alnaschar's basket is still to be met with. And I must cross both desert sand, and ocean wave, before I can pour into your ear the tale of my strange adventures and their marvellous ending. For the present, I conclude, full of thankfulness, but, I trust, not unduly elated. "People I have met" will furnish many an hour's talk, not the least of whom are my two mates and partners—one of whom is now delving away at the claim with old Jack Waters, as if to the manner born; and the other, whom I expect will rejoin me before sunset, is unromantically driving the light waggon containing all our goods and chattels. These "labouring men" are of a type unlikely to be found in any land less contradictory to all preconceived ideas than Australia. They are, in fact and truth, genuine English aristocrats — one being Lord Newstead, the other the Honourable Denzil, son of the Earl of Southwater. They are quite young, hardly past their majority, in fact; but

full of pluck, hungering for adventure, and resolving to see it out before they turn their backs on this Eldorado of the West. Particularly the Honourable Denzil, who is a born explorer and pathfinder. He will make his mark, if I mistake not, before he is many years older.

'It is a great pleasure to me, as you may believe, to work with men of this sort. No doubt we are mutually helpful—their high spirits, and sanguine anticipations, tend to raise mine, which my experience (not to mention that of old Jack) moderates. We have been, since we forgathered, as Scotch people say, a cheerful and congenial party, destined, I think, to become firm friends and attached comrades in the future.'

The afternoon was well advanced when Newstead made his appearance, having come quietly along, sparing his horses, as he had already learned to do since his arrival in Australia. Mr. Banneret had finished his letter and his walk; was therefore not disinclined to have a companion with whom to discuss the situation. He was pleased to find that a share of the only available bedroom had been engaged for him, and deposited his personal property therein with unconcealed satisfaction.

'One can't help being childishly pleased with the certainty of a real bed, and a dinner to match, again,' he said. 'Denzil and I have roughed it as thoroughly as any two "new chums" (which is Australian for English here), and it's done us no end of good. But there's a time for all things, and after six months' hard graft, with a trifle of

hunger and thirst thrown in, it's awfully jolly to come to a land of chops and steaks, sheets and blankets, with a prospect of yet higher life in the near future. But on that we must not dwell yet a while. I suppose you made it all right with the Bank?'

'Yes; the nuggets are safe for the present, and I can draw against them to any reasonable amount. That's consoling. Our next move will be to fix up about the lease, and so on. I've just bought the W.A. Act and Regulations, which I needn't tell you it is vitally necessary to be well up in, on a goldfield. Any big show is sure to be well scrutinised by the "jumper" fraternity, and any joint in the armour pierced, if possible. Litigation, too, always means delay, if not loss and anxiety.'

'How long do we stay here?'

'Only as long as it will take us to complete arrangements. Then you return to the claim, "Waters' Reward." We must call it after old Jack, who has certainly the best title to it, after doing such a "perish," as he would say, in its discovery. You'll see it all in the paper to-morrow morning, for, of course, I've been attacked by the ferocious reporter of the "Dry, dry desolate Land" (with apologies to Mr. Kipling).'

'And you told him all about it?'

'Of course—he has a quasi-legal right to the information, now that the Mining Registrar is in possession of the facts. Payable gold, as you are aware, must be declared within so many days. And as any miner, for a small fee, is entitled to search the Registration Book, there is no object to be gained by secrecy.'

'What a rush there'll be, directly it gets wind! No doubt about that. When does the *Miner's Friend* come out?'

'At breakfast time to-morrow. We had better stable the horses to-night, and keep a good lock on the door, for there'll be many a nag missing by the morning light.'

His conjecture was correct. The news had leaked out accidentally through the office. Told to a few comrades at first, the group had widened. Then like the trickling rill from the faulty reservoir, the rivulet gained width and force, until the volume of sound and objurgation swelled, echoing amid the encampment of huts, tents, and shelter contrivances. The tramp of a thousand men, the galloping of horses, the strange cries of Afghan camel-drivers, formed no inadequate presentment of, in all but the discipline, an army brigade on the march.

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A few hours of the night were devoted to a carefully-thought-out list, and programme of future proceedings, as well as the formation of a list of requisites for Newstead to take back to the claim. A couple of wages men were also engaged, it being thought expedient to strengthen the man-power of the expedition, in view of the crowd of probable fellow-travellers which would be heading for Pilot Mount on the morrow—indeed on that very night. Mr. Banneret was fortunate in picking up a couple of ex-residents on his old field.

They had not been successful, so far, and so

were only too ready to embark under the auspices of the Commissioner, in whom, like all his former subjects (so to speak), they had unbounded faith. 'These men,' he said, 'have been known to me for years, and two better men than Pat Halloran and Mickey Doyle never handled pick and shovel. They are perfectly straight, plucky, and experienced. In anything like danger I would trust my life to them. We were lucky to have fallen in with them. They have travelled, too, in their day, and know New Zealand, from the Thames to Hohitika—as well as Ballarat and Bendigo.'

'So far, so good,' said Mr. Newstead. 'We shall want a lot of stores—machinery too. All sorts of eatables and wearables. No end of sundries, which will "foot up" to a total of some importance. Where shall we get them in your absence? Everything seems to be at war prices.'

'I've fallen on my feet in that matter also. That you can get everything on a goldfield, has always been a contention of mine. It's a sort of Universal Provider shop, once it's been established sufficiently long to attract the regulation army of Adullamites. A goldfield is created for them, and they for a goldfield. We've got two first-class wages men, and I've found the ideal storekeeper and general agent.'

'What's he like?—has been a gentleman, Lord help him! I can't say I care for that brand.'

'Wait till you see him, that's all. He's an old schoolfellow of mine, and his wife's a lady, if ever there was one, as I think you'll admit. I guarantee him.'

'Well, if you do that, it's all right, of course.'

'I vouch for him absolutely. We can depend on not paying a shilling more than the current market price, and on getting everything good of its kind.'

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The return journey and voyage were so little eventful that they require no mention in detail. The local papers were full of highly coloured references to the phenomenal find at Waters' Reward, for which a lease had been granted to Messrs. Banneret and Waters.

'The actual prospector was Mr. John Waters, a pioneer miner, experience in California, Australia, New Zealand, and South America. His name was sufficient among the mining community to account for any fortunate discovery in the world of metals. It was not the first, by a dozen or more. That he had not profited permanently by his well-known rich finds in former days and other climes, must be attributed to the spirit of restless change and hunger for adventure, so characteristic of the miner's life. He had "struck it rich," in mining parlance, again and again. But the "riches had been of the winged description," had flown far and wide—were, for practical purposes, non-existent. There may have been a certain degree of imprudence, but what golden-hole miner hasn't done the same? The fortunate rover lends and spends, ever lavish of hospitality and friendly aid, as if the deposit was inexhaustible. "Plenty more where that came from," is the miner's motto.

'Doubtless there is, but delays occur, protracted

not infrequently within our experience, until the prodigal, like his prototype, is reduced to dire distress and unbefitting occupation. In our respected comrade's case the fickle goddess has again smiled on his enterprise. Let us trust that he will learn from the past to be independent of her moods for the future. The senior shareholder, well known and respected as a Goldfields Warden in another State, has gone east to arrange for the necessary machinery, and the thousand-and-one requisites for a quartz-crushing plant of fifty stamps, with everything, up to the latest date, in the way of metallurgical reduction. No time will be lost in getting it on the ground, and the results will be, it may be confidently stated by this journal, such as will startle the mining world, and give fresh impetus to all industrial occupation in our midst.'

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At home once more. What a blessed sound! comprehensive, endearing, filled with the domestic joys which wife and children supply—a joy such as no other earthly pleasure can simulate. The Commissioner was 'once more on his native heath,' so to speak; and as he walked into his well-remembered office, earlier than usual, in order to take a leisurely survey of the great mass of papers, private and official, which awaited his return, and noted the gathering crowd which had already formed around the Court House door, a certain feeling of regret arose in his mind at the idea that his ministerial and judicial functions were about to cease and determine within so short

a time. True, at times his position had been one of great, even painful responsibility.

It could hardly have been otherwise, when the hundreds, even thousands, of disputes, inevitable on a rich and extensive alluvial goldfield, had, as a Court of First Instance, to be decided by the Commissioner hearing evidence 'on the ground' —the centre of an excited crowd ; or in the district Court House, with counsel for and against, and all legal accessories, but chiefly with the Commissioner as sole adjudicator and all but final referee. To be sure, there was an appeal to the District Court, attending quarterly ; beyond that, if doubt existed, and the claim was sufficiently rich to fee counsel and support the great expense of a Supreme Court trial. A thousand-pounds brief had been handed to the leader of the Bar, in his experience, before now in an important claim. But, so far, his decisions had been chiefly unchallenged. In fewer instances still, had they been reversed. Long years of goldfields wars and rumours of wars had given him such thorough knowledge of the intricacies of that abstruse and (apparently) complicated subject, mineral law, that he was seldom technically doubtful, while his staunch adherence to equity, with an unflinching love of abstract justice, were universally recognised. So, on the whole, as 'a judge, and a ruler in Israel,' his reign had been satisfactory.

And now he was about to relinquish the trappings of office—the prestige—the social weight and authority—which he had held and, in a sense, appreciated for the last decade. True, the ac-

companying distinctions were purely honorary. The salary was barely equal to the family needs, for education, apparel, travelling, and other expenses. But it had sufficed in time past. He was admittedly the leading personage in his provincial circle ; the universal referee in art, letters, sport, and magisterial sway. And the declension to the status of a private individual is after such prominence not unfelt.

On the other hand, what glories, even triumphs, lay in the future, if this marvellous Reward Claim 'kept up,' or 'went down' equally rich! Travel—books—pictures—education—society—all on the higher scale,—money being no object in the coming Arabian Nights existence. Aladdin's lamp would speedily be brought into requisition. Sydney or Melbourne would be their headquarters for the next few years. Of course they would 'go home' as the children grew up. Harrow or Eton—Oxford or Cambridge for the boys. Continental tours—lessons in languages—Henley, in the green English spring. The Derby, the Grand National—Kennington Oval (had they not a cousin a renowned Australian cricketer, who had made the record score in a world-renowned match!). It was too fairy-like—too ecstatic! They would never live to go through the programme. Fate would interfere after her old malign, mysterious fashion, to withhold such superhuman happiness.

But more matter-of-fact mundane considerations had to be considered, and primarily dealt with. Three months' further leave had to be applied for

'upon urgent private affairs,' at the conclusion of which period the applicant proposed to retire from the New South Wales Civil Service. This was tolerably certain to be granted. The appointment was a fairly good one, as such billets go. There are always aspiring suitors for promotion, or officials of equal rank and qualifications, who, from family or other reasons, desire removal.

Of course the truth leaked out after a few days. The departure of the Commissioner and the old prospector had not been unnoticed. No joint enterprise could have been possible in his own district; such a partnership would have been illegal. Even if veiled, it must inevitably have led to complications between private and official relations. Against all such enterprises, however alluring, he had set his face resolutely. So the public came to the conclusion even before the first copies of the *Western Watchman* came to hand, that the 'show' must be in another colony; and so would result only in the loss of their Commissioner and Police Magistrate—in addition to the usual exodus of that section of the population which invariably follows the newest 'rush,' whether to Carpentaria or Klondyke. Then waifs and wasters could be well spared, while the steady workers would be useful in sending back reliable information to their mates and friends. Con Heffernan had started, Patroclus the Greek, Karl Richter, and the two Morgans; they would write quick enough after they got there, and if the find was half as good as was talked about, every man in Barrawong who wasn't married, or

had cash enough to take him there, would be on the road within forty-eight hours.

Of course they would be sorry to lose the Commissioner; they wouldn't get another in a hurry who was as smart, straight, and decided. He was fair, between man and man, and didn't care a hang what creed, country, or caste a man belonged to when he was trying a case. All he wanted was to do justice, and he didn't mind making the law himself sometimes, so as he could give the claim to the right man. Didn't he fight the great No. 4 Black Creek Block case for Pat Farrell and party against the Dawson crowd, and them having a lot of money behind them—after it was adjourned, and remanded and sent to the Full Court in Sydney—fresh magistrates being got to sit on the bench; and, after all, old Pat Farrell got it, with heavy costs against the jumpers? And Mrs. Banneret—wasn't she the kind woman to the diggers' wives and kids?—though she had a young family of her own, and little enough time or money to spare from them. Well, good luck go with them, and the poor man's blessing, wherever they went, far or near! They'd be remembered in Barrawong for many a year to come, anyhow—as long as there was a shaft or a windlass left on the field.

What thoughts and emotions struggled for precedence in Arnold Banneret's breast when he reached the country town near his home, and saw the familiar faces of the provincial inhabitants, mildly interested in the arrival of the daily coach, bringing as usual novelties, human and otherwise

—last from the sea-port, and by that medium from the world at large. Casting his eyes around, after a few hurried but warm greetings, they fell on the well-worn buggy and the favourite pair of horses. His eldest son, a boy of fourteen, held the reins, which he transferred to his father, after replying in the affirmative to the important inquiry, 'All well at home?'

As he gave the accustomed touch, the horses, needing no other hint, started along the metalled high road at a ten-mile-an-hour trot, which they showed no disposition to relax until they came to the turn-off track leading to the home paddock.

'Well, father,' said the youngster, 'you've had a fine time of it, I suppose? I'd have given all the world to have gone with you. I suppose you couldn't take me when you go back?'

'No, my man! You've got your education to attend to, and to see mother and the children settled in Sydney first. I can't afford to stay long. So you'll have to be mother's right-hand man while I'm away.'

'I suppose I'm to go to school when we get to Sydney?'—in a slightly aggrieved tone.

'Of course you are—and to the University afterwards, unless you are not able to pass the Matric.—which I should be sorry to think for a moment you couldn't manage.'

'Oh dear! I suppose it will be years and years of Latin and Greek, and history and geometry, before I can make a start in life for myself. If I'm to be a squatter—and I'm not going to be

anything else—what is the use of losing all this time?'

'My dear boy, you are to have the education of a gentleman. Whether you decide for a bush life or a profession, a mining investor's or a soldier's, it will be equally useful—I may say, indispensable—to you. But there is ever so much time before us in which to settle such a very important question. How well the country is looking! I haven't seen so much grass and water since I left home.'

'It ought to look well—we nearly had a flood in the river last week. The flats were covered, feet deep, but it soon went off again. It won't do any harm, they say; but we thought it would come into the house one evening, and mother sat up half the night. It began to fall next day.'

'That was fortunate. Everything looks flourishing now. Oh, here are the children, all come out to meet Dad, who is a man from a far country. Pull up, Reggie! and I'll get out. Steady, Hector!'

Hector, the impatient, didn't see the use of stopping so near home: indeed, gave two or three tugs and rushes before Mr. Banneret got clear of the buggy. Then there was great kissing and hugging, to be sure, from the half-dozen children, who hung round Daddy's neck and kissed impartially, taking any part of him that came handy. There were four girls and three boys of differing ages and sizes, from Reggie, aged fourteen, and Eric, ten, to Jack and Jill, aged five, and a rose-faced pet of three, who demanded to be taken

into the buggy forthwith. So did the entire troop. But a compromise was effected by the girls getting in, and the boys electing to walk home. The load made no appreciable difference — eleven, including five adults and six children, had been carted eight miles on their first introduction to the district, in the same trap, the redoubtable Hector being quite as hard to hold then as now.

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Such a paradise as home (blessed place and blessed word) appeared to the far-travelled father and husband! We pass over the mutual greetings of wife and husband — matters too sacred for descriptive analysis—'with whose joy the stranger intermeddleth not.' That they 'kissed again with tears,' on one side at any rate, may be conceded. All had gone well during the house-father's absence. Hector had been lame for a week—which had led to anxiety. No cause could be assigned; but the shoeing smith was suspected of a tap with his hammer, as a hint to stand still. He declined to confess, but relieved his mind by abusing Hector as the most impatient, troublesome old wretch whose leg he had ever lifted. Anyhow, he was quite well again, and 'flasher than ever'—this was the second son's contribution to the case.

Next morning, in the pre-breakfast stroll, the springing crops — the wide alluvial flats — the lucerne fields—the dairy herd—the stud of well-bred horses—all appealed to the wanderer's tastes and early associations; the delightful country attributes of a long-held fertile estate

—inherited by the present proprietor. The Commissioner was indeed but a tenant, dwelling in the 'barton,' so to speak, in old English term—the manor was the Squire's by inheritance and occupation since he had come of age. A new house had been built soon after the auspicious occasion of his marriage; while, on the Commissioner's arrival in the district, the roomy, old-fashioned cottage, with large rambling garden and aged orchard, had been gladly rented by him. For a man in his position, no more suitable place could have been found. The families became fast friends, and, what is more to the purpose, remained so for the whole decade during which the Commissioner's official duties attached him to the district. The green fields and pastures were as much his as their owner's, in the sense that a woodland scene belongs to him who can appreciate the lovely, verdant landscape. In earliest spring—in the bracing, but never severe winter of the South land—amid evergreen forests and running streams, even in the torrid summer, when the fresh, dry air has no enervating tendency—in the still dreamy autumn, ere yet the first hint of frost has shown itself in the yellowing oaks and elms—children they of the far north home-land—how good was the outlook! The Commissioner loved these demarcations of the changing year. In the river, which divided the great meadows from the estate of a neighbouring potentate, his boys learned to swim, and, both in the early summer morn and lingering eve, were eager to plunge into its cool depths, or unwilling

to return in time for the evening meal, to race and splash over the pebbly shallows. There were well-grassed paddocks for their ponies as well as for Hector and Paris, and their father's hackney. They established also, it may be easily surmised, trial races and contests with the sons of the house, and by degrees developed the equine association, which helped them notably in the aftertime of polo, hunting, and four-in-hand driving—when such pastimes and practice became suitable to their age and position.

It was a happy time then, with occasional exceptions, for the years of early youth that the children spent at Carjagong ; for the parents also, though work was constant, and the just soul of Proconsul Paterfamilias was often vexed by malign editors and Radical demagogues, who stirred up strife in his kingdom, but he was supported by the more thoughtful of the mining population, as well as by the gentry of the district, with whom the family were always on good terms. A yearly or biennial visit to the cities of the coast gave all hands a taste of social life, and, with a breath of the sea breezes, a sight of the ocean wave and the world-famed harbour. So the family grew up : the girls into vigorous, independent maidens, riding and driving, reading and dancing alternately—with equal enthusiasm, as is the wont of the country-reared damsel, whether in Britain or Australia, Galway or Goulburn. There is, it must be allowed, in both hemispheres a note of freshness, vigour, and vitality observable in the country cousins, to which the town denizens, *blasées* with

unnumbered dissipations, rarely attain. Added to the ordinary accomplishments, in which they were fairly proficient, they had from time to time personal experience of the household duties, which the dearth of female domestics—then as now a grave matter of concern on the part of matrons—rendered necessary. Thus it must be allowed that for the position of chatelaine, to which, in due course of time, they might reasonably aspire, they were fairly equipped.

And the sons of the house, destined in days to come to work in distant States, or 'outside' regions, calling for leaders in the various industries of a great, almost boundless continent, would be found not unequal in brain or muscle to the duties imposed on them. Sons and grandsons of pioneers, they inherited the thirst for adventure which had brought the founder of the family, sea-borne in his own galley, like a Viking of old, so far across the restless main, to the new world under the Southern Cross. And now the abiding-place of the Bannerets was again to be changed. Leaving on former occasions their established residences in or near the principal cities of the coast, where flower-gardens bloomed, and orchards bore their annual store of tropical or British fruits, they had voyaged, or journeyed, to new, unpeopled regions. The same experience had been repeated—the building, the planting, the rearing of stock, the turning of waste land into fields and gardens, vineyards and olive-yards—sometimes for the benefit of the exiled family, more often for the use and reward of others when the route was given once again.

There had been sadness and heartburnings on all these occasions of uprooting ties and friendships which more than once had struck deep into a kindly soil; but the inherited pioneer instinct had triumphed over all regrets. Sometimes the exodus had been from a country life to that of cities; then the regret was softened by the anticipation of metropolitan privileges—the meeting with friends and relatives, the enchantments of novelty and romance. Still, again, the departure from these new delights to a distant, untried region, a strange environment, an unknown society, was proportionately distasteful.

But the Bannerets were an adaptable race: they soon familiarised themselves with new surroundings. Hot or cold, plain or forest, 'out back' or near town, it seemed alike to them. They discovered kindred spirits in the strangers amongst whom, for the first time, they were thrown. They were sociable to the point of tolerating those whom they could not admire; being civil and friendly to all sorts and conditions of men, ready to do a kindness whenever such opportunity came in their way, while preserving, as far as in them lay, that standard of conduct and manners which had been habitual from childhood. Small wonder, then, that they never left one of the country towns, to which the exigencies of official or pastoral life guided their steps, without public regrets being expressed. A presentation in every case accompanied the address, which, in the shape of coin of the realm, was not unwelcome. Their residence in this, a fertile as well as gold-

bearing district, had exceeded the usual term, and the manifestations of public sympathy were therefore more general and pronounced.

To be sure, on the following morning after the Commissioner's arrival, when it was announced that he had decided to ask for three months' leave of absence, and to retire at the end of that time from the Government service, there was a certain excitement, almost a commotion.

Many of the inhabitants, who had accepted the rule of the Commissioner without any particular enthusiasm, were always willing to admit that he was a man ready to work in season or out of season, whenever there was public duty to be performed—considerate and impartial—treating the Christian or the Chinaman according to the Act and Regulations in such cases made and provided, and to no other code, moral or otherwise; an official almost ceaselessly employed during the waking hours—often before sunrise, or after dark, by the journeys which his duties of inspection rendered indispensable; rarely known to be tired, ill, or discourteous; ready alike to hear as patiently the case of the humblest miner as that of the most powerful syndicate;—such was his record for the ten long years that he had lived among them in almost daily intercourse. A judge and a ruler, moreover, whose decisions, in the words of an influential local journal, 'had been rarely appealed against, and still more rarely reversed.'

As in many other possessions and privileges, the benefits of which are not sufficiently valued until in danger of being lost, great was the outcry,

many the professions of regret, when the news of resignation was confirmed. Where were they to get another man versed in their mining laws?

Then the family, that was another important consideration. From the lady of the house downward, they were favourites in the district. Friendly and sympathetic with all classes, there was no case of sorrow or distress where they were not helpful in aid, as far as their means allowed. Fond of amusement in a rational way, they joined in all the social and public entertainments with a cordiality which notably tended towards their success —pecuniary or otherwise. At bazaars for charitable purposes, hospital balls, race meetings, and other enterprises, they were well to the fore—entering into the spirit of the entertainments and giving unstinted personal service. And now, the Commissioner and this exceptional family were about to leave them and be replaced, possibly, by a formal, ceremonious personage, who disliked the mining duties of his appointment, and was concerned chiefly with the magisterial routine of Court, and Petty Sessions duty, which he would (erroneously) consider more dignified and aristocratic than riding hither and thither in all kinds of weather, early and late, inspecting shafts, and, indeed, descending occasionally into the bowels of the earth, where a feeling of insecurity was painfully present. On the other hand, this gloomy probability might not be realised. There were popular Commissioners and able Police Magistrates yet to be found in the land. Many of them had wives and daughters capable of irradiating the

social atmosphere and helping in all good works. They must keep a good heart, and hope for the best; and if they could not keep their proconsul, so to speak, for the term of his natural life—which would be unjust on the face of it, inasmuch as he had dropped on a veritable 'golden hole,'—they must wish him luck, and give him a good 'send off.' And to that end, the best plan now was to hold a public meeting, appoint a strong committee, and show what the miners of the great alluvial field of Barrawong could do to show their appreciation of 'a man and a gentleman,' a friend of every miner, rich or poor, and a magistrate whom every man on the field respected, even when he decided against him. This, of course, took time, but everybody worked with a will, and the committee, composed of leading miners, storekeepers, bankers, and magistrates of the district, made great progress. Dinners were given in his honour, speeches were made, even a ball was 'tendered to him and his amiable family'—such were the words of the invitation in which reference was made to all the good qualities which could be packed into any given official, and freely attributed to him. The ball was a great success; the room was handsomely decorated with the great fronds of the tree fern, the mimosa, and other botanical favourites, intermixed with flags of all nations, which, indeed, the festive company represented. The Mayor in the opening quadrille danced with Mrs. Banneret, the Commissioner with the Mayoress, and according to their degree, as in more aristocratic circles, the other sets were

arranged. That ball was a pronounced success. It was referred to, at intervals, for years afterwards, as the Commissioner's farewell ball. Not only were the *élite* of the mining community present, but the families of the leading residents of the district for many miles round, who had travelled long distances in order to attend. Mrs. Banneret was driven home at a comparatively early period in the evening, but the Commissioner, who had been devoted to dancing in his youth, and was not now beyond the age when that charming exercise can be enjoyed, remained until the 'wee short hour ayont the twal',' when finding that the gate of the stable-yard was locked, and the groom asleep, he felt himself almost in a quandary. However, being a man of resource, as from his varied occupations he needed to be, he saddled his well-known cob, and leading that well-trained hackney through the back door of the hotel parlour, and across the floor, he made a safe exit by the front, and reached home without let or hindrance.

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After years of settled official work—not hard or distasteful, but still compulsory and exacting—there is always an exhilarating feeling, resulting from the knowledge that henceforth the trammels of regulated occupation are loosed for ever. Like the freed bird darting into the blithe sunshine, the wide world seems opened, as in our boyhood, to an exhaustless series of wonders and privileges impossible in the earlier stages of life for lack of time, opportunity, money—if you will. Travelling, the very salt of life, has been sparely,

if at all, enjoyed. There are cities to visit—art treasures in which to revel—every kind and degree of rational enjoyment open to him and those dear ones whose welfare had always been his highest aim and consideration.

It is a matter generally of chastened, peaceful enjoyment to the released official of any degree, when, as dear 'Elia' phrases it, he can 'go home for good'—with an income sufficient to provide suitably for the declining years of life. But what must be his feelings when such a man is suddenly translated into a position of affluence—to wealth beyond his wildest dreams? Hardly that, perhaps, as every one connected with a goldfield can dream, and generally does, of the lease so slow 'in beating the water,' the reef so unwilling to 'jump' from pennyweights to ounces, floating him out to measureless wealth, celebrity, and world-wide fame. Now, however, for the Commissioner all the anxieties, uncertainties, and regrets of daily life had suddenly come to an end. The 'Last Chance' was a proved, triumphant success—seven to ten ounces to the ton, the great reef doing better and better as it went down—the richest claim in the richest and, for the future, the largest goldfield in Australia—the end of doubt, debt, and difficulty had come. "His fortune was made!' The well-worn phrase in commonest use among all classes and conditions, trite and terse, even vulgarly so, but how comprehensive! The open sesame to how many doors, gates, and treasure-caves of delights innumerable, jealously guarded in the past. What a heaven in anticipation seemed opening

before him! But even then a half-regretful feeling arose — a sigh escaped for the old, fully occupied life of 'pleasure and pain,' when 'the hardest day was never then too hard.' Certainly there had been doubts, wearying anxieties, troubles, burdens of debt, disappointments; but, as a set-off, the family had enjoyed, on the whole, excellent health, high spirits, and reasonable comfort.

He himself had never had, with one exception (an intrusive fever), a day's illness, or absence from work on that account. Would this Arcadian state of matters be continuous in the future? He did not know—who can tell what a day may bring forth? He would be separated from his family for months at a time. This was inevitable. The goldfield was distant, and at the most dangerous period of occupation,—scourged with typhoid fever, pneumonia, influenza, dysentery, what not? Afflicting fatally the young and brave, the old and feeble, the hardy miner and the immature tourist, how would his family fare? Of course he would not take his wife and children there—the thought was impossible. Heat and dust, bad water, bad food, flies in myriads, no domestic servants, or merely the outlaws of the industrial army—the thought was too distasteful! So, even at this stage, the prosperity was not unalloyed; what condition of human existence is, when we come to think? Dangers thicken at every step in the battle of life, but better they a hundredfold than the cankers, the 'moth and rust' of inglorious peace. 'However,' thought Banneret, as he roused himself from this introspective reverie, 'here is a state of

so-called prosperity, for which I have been longing, consciously or otherwise, all my life ; and now that it *has* come, why am I indulging in useless regrets and imaginary, unreal drawbacks? Surely, as I have fought against trouble and discouragement in the past, I ought not to waver at the ideal fairy-land in the future.'

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The final arrangements which heralded the departure of the Banneret family from Carjagong, where they had led a tranquil and, on the whole, happy existence, were carried out successfully. The address and testimonial were presented in due form. In the address the departing official was credited with all the virtues ; and the testimonial, which took the form of coin of the realm, was a liquid asset which had been decidedly useful in former flittings of exceptional expensiveness.

They reached Sydney, by coach and train, without mishap or difficulty. The children were joyous, and unceasing in their wonder and admiration of wayside novelties, including snow, to a fall of which they were, for the first time in their lives, introduced.

The day on which they re-entered Sydney will always be marked with a white stone in the annals of the family. It was the opening month of the southern spring, and no more brilliant specimen of that gladsome season could have been presented to the eyes of the travellers. They had left a region where, though the climate was comparatively mild, the lingering winter months were austere. Hence the semi-tropical warmth of the air, the

blue, cloudless sky of the metropolis, were grateful as novelties to the wayfarers from the interior. The younger olive-branches had of course in their ten years' sojourn rarely seen the sea; the elder ones had but dim remembrance of it; and when the first sight of the historic harbour burst upon their gaze from the balcony of their hotel, a cry of wonder and amazement could not be suppressed, in spite of the nurse's remonstrance.

'Not quite so much noise, my dears!' said the watchful mother. 'You must learn not to shout and cry out at everything you see, or else people will think you are wild bush children, that have never been taught anything. You will see so many new things every day.'

'Yes, we know, mother,' said the eldest girl. 'But there is only *one* harbour! Doesn't it look bright and beautiful to-day? It is almost calm, like a great lake. How the little white-sailed boats go skimming over it, like sea-birds! There is a beautiful ship being towed in by a little tug steamer. And, oh, here comes the mail-boat; how quiet and dignified she is! She wants no tug, does she? That's the best of a steamer: she can get along, fair weather or foul.'

'Sometimes, when a great storm catches her, even she has to "slow down," as sailors say; but generally, of course, she is independent of wind and weather. And now it is nearly lunch time, so we must all go and get ready.'

'I went out in a sailing-boat,' said Reggie, with an air of experience, 'last summer when I was down. Didn't she lean over, too? But, oh, how

she did cut through the water! It was grand. And another day Mr. Northam took out me and the Merton boys in his steam-yacht to Middle Harbour. I liked that almost better. We had such a jolly lunch, and went on shore afterwards. It was ever so hot, so we bathed, and ate rock oysters, and had no end of fun. The country's all very well, but give me the sea at Christmas time.'

'You'll be at the King's School next week,' said his mother, with quiet emphasis, 'so I advise you to make the most of your time for a few days. I can't have you idling about town, and losing precious opportunities.'

Reggie's face fell just the least bit at this announcement, but soon recovered its uniformly cheerful expression.

'Can't we stay till we go into the new house; that won't be long, I suppose?'

'Not a day longer than I can help, my boy. School is your most important affair for the next three or four years, and your father expects you to distinguish yourselves—that is, you and Eric; Jack must stay with Miss Charters for another year. Just fancy what a fine time you'll have! Ever so many playfellows—cricket and football, hare and hounds, steeplechases, all kinds of games. You'll be so happy after the first week that you won't want to come home.'

'I shall never feel like *that*, mother!' said the boy feelingly. 'Don't make any mistake.'

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The eventful step was fully carried out; a

comfortable house in one of the picturesque suburbs of Sydney was rented and furnished ; the father's farewells were made—those adieus sometimes temporary, but which the heart is prone to suggest may be eternal ; and as the mail-boat majestically moved on her course through the great sandstone gates of the landlocked haven, the tears fell fast from the eyes of more than one of the little party as her smoke faded from view behind the lofty headland.

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Again the week-long voyage—the sighting of the far western ports—the hasty landing—the railway crowding—the short stay at Perth—the uneventful, uninteresting overland journey through country which nothing but the possession of goldfields could render interesting, though occasionally touching upon patches more or less agricultural or pastoral. The motley crowd of pilgrims to the Mecca of Mammon was indeed a medley, as are all goldfields crusades. Runaway sailors, deserting soldiers, shepherds, stockriders, navvies, nobodies, gentlemen 'formerly in the army,' Cambridge and Oxford graduates, ex-Queensland squatters —some with two horses, some with a packhorse only, but by far the greater number depending entirely upon the all-sufficing 'bluey' (or blue blanket) carried on the shoulders, and containing the owner's food, wardrobe, cooking utensils, and worldly possessions generally. Southern Cross, a year-old town, was not materially different in architecture, dust, flies, banks, and blasphemy, from 'rushes' with which the Commissioner had

been familiar, only 'more so,' perhaps—every discomfort and departure from civilised life being strongly accentuated. A much-begrudged hour or two was spent, or rather wasted here, and through the clear, starlit night the expedition pushed silently onward. Taking counsel of past experience, the leader had left little to the chances of the journey. He had provided a substantial waggonette, heavier than the first vehicle in which he and old Waters had travelled to the Pilot Mount; a forty-gallon cask for water—a good-sized condenser, in case they ran short of the indispensable element—chaff and oats sufficient for their four horses, with tinned meat and fish to ensure a variety of 'cuisine'; rifles, repeaters, and double-barrels, with revolvers in good order, and plenty of ammunition; also a fair-sized tent, with folding-table and seats, as a lengthened stay at the claim, which was now a certainty, would need these accessories for reasonable comfort, now that there was no doubt of the reef being permanent, rich, wide, and going down equally so—indeed better the deeper it went down. After leaving Southern Cross the desert journey recommenced, but now there was no difficulty in finding the road. Every kind of track was printed in large type upon the broad sheet of the Waste. Carts and waggons, horses and bullock teams, had been there. The camels, following one behind the other, had left their soft, narrow paths through sand-hill and spinifex plain, salt lake and clay pan. This they could note as they went through mulga and low acacia scrub until Pilot Hill, as

the eminence had been named, was sighted. Some of the 'soaks' emptied by the horses and camel trains had not refilled, but their reserve of cask water stood well to them in temporary need. And after a journey neither protracted nor arduous, they greeted old Jack and Southwater, who had managed to put up a comfortable shanty, and pointed proudly to a 'township' of tents, and hessian edifices, occupying a considerable stretch of country.

Great congratulations greeted them from the resident partners, and much curiosity was expressed as to the nature of the supplies which they had brought with them, as well as of those which were to follow on, with the machinery, and all the component parts of the up-to-date plant, which were even now on the road. As the prospectors and shareholders in the Reward Claim, they were objects of respectful admiration, and praised in the local newspapers for endurance, high intelligence, courage, all sorts of heroic qualities—the whole finished off with the golden crown of success, which never fails to irradiate the wearer and his surroundings.

Awaking from his humble but not uncomfortable couch in the tent, which had been pitched without loss of time, Arnold Banneret gazed around the wide expanse with grateful and, indeed, enviable feelings. Here was, if not the goal of his ambition, a near approach to it. He had neared the winning-post, and though the trophy had not as yet been placed in his hands, there was no moral doubt that he would shortly be in possession

of the coveted prize—and what a prize it would be! Well worth the toil, the risk, the anxiety which he had gone through, the years of hard work—sometimes indeed pressing closely upon his powers of mind and body. With but a moderate income, he had cheerfully faced the task of providing for the wants of a large family. They had been fed and clothed, educated and prepared for their station in life as gentlefolk. At times there had been but the narrowest margin—at times painful doubt, depressing anxiety.

But the parents had never despaired. A gleam of hope—a ray of sunshine even when skies were darkest—had never failed to illumine the path. One of the partners in the social-personal-national enterprise (it is unnecessary to inquire which) had never faltered or swerved from the solemn contract; and now, after years of doubt and struggle, the goal was won. Success was assured—it was almost a moral certainty,—a life-long provision for him and his, an assured position, a name and fame, even distinction, for all their future life. As he stood before his tent door and watched the red-gold sun invade the unclouded firmament, when the morning mists, unlike the heavier masses of more favoured climes, made haste to disperse and disappear, he could have fancied himself an Arab sheikh. There were no Bedouins within sight, a fact on which he congratulated himself. But a long line of camels with their turbaned drivers, coming 'up from the under world,' supplied proof that the desert conditions were not wholly, absolutely non-existent.

How differently indeed the point of view adds to or subtracts from the treatment of any given situation. To the famished explorer with beaten horses or starving camels, how drear and terrible the outlook over the 'sun-scorched desert, wild and bare'—the stunted shrubs, the stony surface, the arid waste! Weak and low, faint with hunger, or frantic with thirst, he can barely summon sufficient energy to make one last effort for the hidden spring and—life.

Here, before the Commissioner, lay the same landscape—but for the scattered huts and tents, as carelessly distributed over the forlorn levels as if they had been rained down from the sky in some abnormal storm-burst. Yet the man in front of the tent saw so much besides the dusky levels—the stunted, colourless copses, with their distorted, dwarfish acacia trees—the restless team and saddle horses crowding around the drays as if imploring provender, too sensible of the sterility of the land to waste time in wandering on a vain search for pasture. The risen sun, which so many a fainting straggler cursed, as the red globe rose higher through the pitiless firmament, was to him the symbol of honour and happiness to come. The far distance, in which a pale mist shrouded the naked rocks and scarred cliffs of a barrier range, was grandly mysterious in his eyes, as concealing treasure untold. The bells which now commenced to mingle and blend as the teams came in, or were driven towards the Pilot Mount, clanged and jangled not without a certain rude melody. An occasional flight of waterfowl on their way to the

coast, or a far inland lake, passed in swaying files high overhead—guided, who shall say by what course of reasoning or memory, to river, mere, or lake? And like the historic mariner, his heart went out to the birds, and 'he blessed them unawares.' His heart, full of joy and thankfulness, was softened by the relief from care which had been granted to him, and he wished well to all living things. The day which began with the sun's blessing on him and his, so to speak, continued and ended with the same—in strict consonance with the feelings of the principal shareholder in the 'Last Chance,' now far heralded as a treasure claim. As the sun rose high and yet higher at mid-day, and lingeringly dwelt up crag and hollow, sand waste and scrub, until the utmost limit of his course, it was more or less oppressive to the crowd of toilers, who had worked since dawn. But what of that? The air was dry, fresh, and, to the unworn constitutions of the greater number of the workers on 'the field,' invigorating. There was no hint of enervating moisture in the heated air which the north wind sent along, in steady waves, from the innermost deserts. Clothing was of the lightest possible texture, and as little of it as conventions would allow—though here, as in all Australian congregations, when leisure and recreation cried truce to the excitement of toil, the canons of British taste were observed. And in favour of the climate, which had no tropical disabilities or defects, the nights—inestimable blessing—were cool.

The breakfast hour permitted a free and full

discussion of ways and means—men and machinery —past and present—with sketch notes of the general rise and progress of the partnership during his absence.

Nothing could have been more satisfactory. 'The men had all worked first-rate,' old Jack said —'the swell as hard as any of 'em—perhaps harder.' Mr. Southwater was a terror for hard graft, and would have a claim of his own some day. He was a born bushman, could work dead reckoning, and would make a smart sailor-man, if ever he got the chance. He'd come to something, no fear! Con Heffernan was as good a chap as ever handled a pick—a 'rale white man.' Everything had gone on first-rate—no rows, and all as smooth as a greased hide rope.

Mr. Newstead said he thought he would go home, now he could raise the passage money on his shares; but he'd leave a good man in his place. To which determination he promptly gave effect. All was now plain sailing. Of course there was hard unremitting work. From daylight to dark, no rest for head and hand; but then there was much to show for it. The arrivals of men and merchandise were large and exciting. Carpenters, machinists, 'wages men'—as ordinary mine labourers were called—arrived in hundreds.

Claims were taken up for miles around the Pilot Mount, in every direction: claims for alluvial; reef claims, wherever there was a lump of quartz as big as a cricket ball; water claims, wherever the drainage from a 'soak' would fill a bucket in a day; 'dry-blowing claims,' wherever a

speck of gold could be extracted by one of the most primitive of all processes. All this various assemblage contributed doubtless to the name and fame of the far-bruited 'Last Chance,' of which the shares rose in value until the original holders looked on themselves as prospective, if not indeed, actual millionaires. But there was another side to the shield, which commenced to make itself clearly apparent through the somewhat blurred and distorted social atmosphere.

Among the miscellaneous crowd of adventurers and tourists who had dared the privations of desert travel, was a contingent of lady nurses. These meritorious women, not less daring than the reckless miners who had faced death in so many shapes, in so many lands, had joined the army of hope at the earliest stage that transit could be guaranteed. *They* knew, none better, how soon the fever scourge of crowded camps, civil or military, would 'take up a claim,' ever widening and expansive, sheltered by the dark wing of Azrael. How many a day, how many a night, in burning heat or freezing cold, had each volunteer for the 'forlorn hope' of Christian charity watched by the delirious, fever-stricken patient, whose fate it was to sink lower and lower, until he gasped out his life, holding the hand of his truest friend in need, or, faintly rallying, lived to greet the 'opening paradise' of 'the common air, the fields, the skies,' and to know himself once more a man among men!

At first, in the inevitable turmoil, the rush and hurry of a big and daily-growing field, but

scant attention was bestowed upon the dread disease, or the 'cases' which began to multiply. The report that Jack Wilson was 'down with the fever,' or Pat Murphy had 'got it bad, and mightn't recover,' was little heeded, but when poor Pat died, and was followed to the grave by an imposing array of miners, public interest was aroused. A committee of miners and citizens was elected, a hospital site was determined upon, and on the following day (Monday) a building of hessian and poles was commenced, and notable progress made before nightfall. Subscriptions poured in: the big mine gave twenty guineas, other firms and claims in proportion, but all liberally, not to say generously, and, within a week, a building not particularly ornate, but weather-tight, and suitably provided with beds and subdivisions, with the all-sufficing corrugated iron roof, was 'inaugurated,' as the local journal proudly described the opening ceremony, by a large and influential gathering of citizens. It may be mentioned that the mining arrangement of eight-hour 'shifts' was resorted to, the urgency of the occasion justifying this departure from routine and trade habitudes.

The ex-Commissioner had always, at his several commands and headquarters, taken an interest in the hospital question, having in his official life been brought into contact with the dreadful accidents and deadly epidemics from which no mining communities are free. So he made it his business to call in due form upon the nurses, who formed the vanguard of the Nightingale

battalion, and assure them of his sympathetic aid if such should be needed. He ordered improvements to be made in the buildings, and guaranteed the expense incurred. He also arranged a 'little dinner' in their honour at the principal (and only) hotel, to which, besides his partner, Mr. Southwater, he invited the Warden of the district, as well as other persons in authority, and a few leading citizens with their wives. The entertainment passed off extremely well, and was appreciated by the mining contingent, as recognising the lady nurses' position and, as such, giving them social standing.

It was just as well that Mr. Banneret made himself acquainted with the hospital and the *personnel* of its guardian angels—a term used by himself in the aftertime—as, within a month after the official opening, he was himself an inmate of the institution referred to.

Yes! there was no immunity, no safeguarding by means of careful sanitation at the claim, temperate living, box baths (though these were in the nature of luxuries), an elevated situation—precautions which, under other circumstances, and in other places, had baffled the fever fiend. First a queer feeling, half-cold and shivering, half-hot and feverish; then a racking headache, vainly endured, and struggled against in hope of relief—worse on the next day; then the ordinary symptoms: a sleepless night, a half-conscious feeling of 'lightheadedness.' On the morrow, word went through the camp that Mr. Banneret, of the great Reward Claim at Pilot Mount, was

in the hospital, 'down with typhoid.' The building had been full for days, but one bed had been vacated, at the instance of Head Physician Death, and into the empty cot the 'respected chief shareholder in the well-known Reward Claim' (see the *Miner's Mentor* of the day, 'Personal Column') and ex-Commissioner of Barrawong was deposited. On the morning which followed, the patient was in a high fever, raving in delirium, temperature 105 degrees. The doctor pronounced it a definite case of typhoid. On the first day of the seizure—how sudden and cruel it was!—he had written to his wife that he had dropped in for a 'feverish attack,' but not to be alarmed—would probably pass off in a day or two—she knew he had felt that way before; but had thought it wiser, considering the heat of the climate, to go to bed for a day or two. The hospital was really most comfortable, and well managed; in Mrs. Lilburne he had, she would be glad to hear, a most capable and attentive nurse. She was on no account to be alarmed, or to *dream* of coming over—which would only be an expensive and disagreeable journey for her. Mrs. Lilburne would write and tell her how he was getting on. It was a great nuisance—indeed, most disappointing—that this sort of thing should have happened, and that he had more than once been tempted to wish himself back at poor old Barrawong; though, of course, they had gone through the same epidemic there, when poor young Danvers, the curate at the township, and Mr. Thornton, who was past middle age, with ever so many other people, had

died, and it seemed to be in the nature of a lottery who should catch it and who should escape, who should live and who should die. He was glad to hear that Reggie was getting on so well at school, and that the other children were thriving. He had got little Winnie's letter, and would answer it to-morrow, etc. When the morrow came, as before stated, he was not in a condition to write or read letters, or indeed to perform any of the literary duties which had previously occupied much of his time. The doctor and the nurse were engaged in anxious consultation—the one taking his temperature, which the nurse registered very carefully; both faces wearing a very serious, indeed anxious expression.

'You think it will go hard with him, doctor?' queried she.

'Can't say at this stage,' said the medico, with a professional air of immobility; 'must run its course. A great deal will depend on his constitution and the nursing. I am glad it was *your* turn, Mrs. Lilburne.'

'He shan't fail for that, doctor, if I keep going,' said the pale, refined-looking woman.

'I know, I know,' replied the man of life and death. 'But don't *you* get laid up, or I don't know what we shall do. Good morning!' And the hard-worked physician walked out, and drove off along the dusty track at a pace much above the regulation rate.

'That Mrs. Lilburne, as she called herself,' thought he—'I don't know whether it's her right name, or, indeed, whether any of their names are

really their own—a lot of mystery about nurses in back block hospitals, I've always found—but this one is different from the rank and file. I wonder what her history is—must have some sort of *past*, as the new slang is: husband cleared out from her, or she from him; married before, and forgot to mention it. Talk about lawyers having secrets! we doctors could beat them hollow if we only chose to let them out—which we don't. We are the real father confessors, if the world only knew. Anyhow, this poor chap is lucky to have Madonna Lilburne to look after him. I'm afraid it's a poor look-out for him; hard lines, too, when he's the richest man on the field. Fortune of war, I suppose; can't be helped.'

The patient had written a comforting letter, as he thought, to his wife. It had, however, quite a different effect. Mrs. Banneret knew her husband of old, and could gauge his every thought and action.

A man averse to speaking of minor ailments, he was always worse than he appeared to be, in consequence of this habit of reticence. He despised the habit of complaint with which men that he knew were in the habit of disturbing the household and their wives. Consequently he fell into the other extreme: delaying the notice which would have procured aid or arrested illness. He had repeated the imprudence, she could plainly perceive. Fever probably had set in. He might be even now in the dangerous stage. How dangerous, how short the interval between it and the last journalistic reference: 'We regret to

have to announce,' etc., she knew well. Had she not seen from the West Australian papers, which she scanned so eagerly, the portentous death-roll, in which she prayed to God—how earnestly who can tell—that her husband's name might never be found? There was no time to be lost; join him of course she would; was he to die, alone and untended except by unknown, perhaps incapable women, who had been lured to the goldfield by exaggerated reports of easily found fortune—adventuresses, or worse? It was agony to think of his being left in such hands. She read and re-read his letter—perhaps the last he would ever write. Of course he had made the best of it; he always did. But there was much to be done, much to be thought out. The mail steamer sailed to-morrow. She would—she *must* go to him. The time was short—too short. The Adelaide express would be in time? No! she would get on board—the railway might meet with an accident—a strike was threatened by the employees if wages or privileges were reduced. Heartless wretches! What did they care for sickness and death—the grief of the widow, the orphans left fatherless? It must be admitted that in this hour of misery, almost of despair, her righteous indignation was fervid, glowing, and would have burnt up the Trades Hall delegates like so many priests of Baal had she had the prophetic power.

With but a short interval granted to natural sorrow, action was quickly taken. The children were too young to be left unguarded. But in the city where she, where her mother, indeed, had

been born, she had many relatives—not a few staunch family friends. They came forward in her hour of need. A cousin, capable and sympathetic, volunteered to supervise the household in her absence. Needful preparation was quickly made. Far into the night she sat and wrote, leaving minute instructions—even farewells, in case she took infection. And at noon on the following day, amid the crowd of passengers on board the *Kashmir*, bound for Europe *via* Western Australia, stood Marcia, the wife of Arnold Banneret, lately the Commissioner of Barrawong town and district, but now the largest shareholder in the well-known Reward Claim and—a patient in the fever ward of Pilot Mount local hospital.

Shipwreck rarely occurs among first-class liners like the *Kashmir*, P. & O., but there *is* such a thing as a broken shaft. As a rule it is calculable within a few hours when such a marine miracle of speed, comfort, and ordered energy arrives at her destination. Such was the case when the *Kashmir* arrived at Adelaide.

She was met at the landing by a friend of the family, who handed her a telegram :—

On board P. & O. steamer *Kashmir*.—Mr. Banneret better. Dr. Horton considers crisis past. No need for haste.

But the sick man's wife was of a different way of thinking. 'I shall be for ever grateful to you for your kindness,' she said, 'but I can only rest when I am where my husband lies sick. Pray God it may not be unto death, and that I am not too late.'

'I can assure you,' said the kindly matron,

'that you may trust Dr. Horton implicitly. He objects to messages that disguise the truth. He would not have permitted this to be sent if not strictly reliable.'

'Thank God! thank God! if it be so. And now when does the train start?'

'You won't think of leaving to-night, surely? We counted upon your staying with us till to-morrow.'

'I am sorry to seem uncourteous, but I cannot lose an hour that may be used in bringing me nearer to him. I ordered my luggage to be sent to the railway station. The Captain assured me that it should be done.'

'You are very determined,' said Mrs. Hampton, smiling, 'but I will not press you further, if you will stay with us on your return?'

'Most willingly, and will do anything you like to ask me. If my husband is well, and returning with me, as I trust he will, you will find me quite a different woman.'

'Then we'll have a cup of tea, and I'll drive you to the station. There is sure to be some one we know going on, and I can assure you of a guide, and perhaps a companion.'

Thus reassured, the wifely anxiety became somewhat lessened, and she consented to a hasty meal before being driven to the railway station. Here she found that an engaged carriage had been thoughtfully secured for her, and that her lighter luggage had been placed therein, while the attentive guard placed the checks in her hand for the trunks.

With hearty thanks, and a cordial handclasp, she said adieu to the friend in need. Just before the train started, a well-dressed, ladylike woman was introduced as Mrs. Wharton, and took her seat beside her. 'Nearly lost my passage,' she said, 'but you know how one is rushed at the last moment. However, here I am, and as I live near Kalgoorlie, I shall be glad to give you any information that may be useful. This is your first visit, I hear.'

'Yes, indeed! and but for my husband's illness I should not have thought of making it now.'

The strange lady's face changed to an expression of sympathy and regret, as she said, 'Not too serious, I hope?'

'He is in the hospital, ill with typhoid fever. I have had a telegram from the doctor attending him. He thinks the crisis past, and that he is mending.'

'What was the doctor's name?'

'Horton. Mrs. Hampton said he was strictly reliable.'

'So he is. He always thinks it better that people should be told the truth—you may depend upon his report absolutely.'

'Thank you so much! I feel encouraged to think that the worst is over. You have been living at Kalgoorlie, I think you said?'

'Oh yes! for several years; but I have only just returned from England, where my young people are at school. They are all well, I am thankful to say, and I am returning to live with my husband for another two or three years, after

which, as our mine, the "Golden Helmet," is paying well, I trust we may go to England for good.'

'And do you like living here?'

'Oh! I have to like it, or be separated from my husband, which I could not endure. After all, the life up here is not unendurable. The winter is pleasant enough. And in the hottest part of the summer we get away to the coast for a month or two. It's not so bad as one would think. We visit about among ourselves. There are a few nice families, and the young people have polo, racing, and an occasional ball. We see many English people of good family from time to time—more perhaps than in the older communities—and manage to exist very tolerably.'

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So the day and the long night in the train passed not uncomfortably. At the stopping stages refreshments were procurable.

The wearied women slept soundly at intervals, and as the morning broke, and found them still speeding across the interminable waste, the cool breeze, after they had dressed and breakfasted, refreshed them considerably. Mrs. Banneret began to lose the haggard air as of one expectant of evil—of nameless dread, and responded to her companion's efforts to induce a more cheerful frame of mind.

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Pilot Hill was descried at last—the township reached; and then a journey had to be taken by coach, for of course the mail service had been contracted for by an American firm. Fast coaches, with well-fed horses, had succeeded to the slow

and toilsome waggonette-travelling. Short stages were alone thought of, and with only a minimum of discomfort Mrs. Banneret found herself at the Royal Palace Hotel, where a note written with a very shaky hand awaited her :—

My darling Wife—I tried my best to prevent your taking this unnecessary journey—you will own—but, as usual, you would have your own way. A week ago it looked as if you would arrive just in time to see my grave —in the cemetery, which is filling all too quickly. Now, thanks to Mrs. Lilburne and Dr. Horton, you will discover what is left of me. I must leave off, and lie down to gather strength to welcome you.—Always your fond husband, Arnold Banneret.

The woman knelt down in the queer little bedroom, where she and her luggage—dust-covered and travel-stained—had been deposited, and poured forth her thanks to that Great Being who had once again listened to her prayer, and restored him for whose love and companionship she chiefly lived. Only allowing the shortest interval for adjustment of dress and removal of dust, Marcia Banneret hardly waited for a guide to the hospital. That reached, she walked quietly into the convalescent ward, and kneeling by the bed which held a wasted, pallid, altered man, whom she hardly at first recognised as her husband, she flung herself on her knees, and sobbed out her love for him and gratitude to the Most High—almost in the same breath.

How changed from the strong man whom she last saw at their old home !—a man whom travel, toil, privation of any ordinary kind, in whatever weather it might be—winter storm or summer

heat—seemed but to refresh and invigorate. And now, how shrunken, nerveless, emaciated !—every trace of colour fled from his bronzed cheek, and supplanted by the saffron hue which confinement of any kind conjoined with disease brings even to the most robust.

Was this indeed Arnold Banneret ? When he saw himself in the glass he hardly recognised his own features.

'I am afraid I must interrupt the interview, Mrs. Banneret,' said a low, carefully modulated voice, as, after premonitory tapping, the slender, graceful form of Nurse Lilburne entered the room ; 'but, with apologies to you, Dr. Horton cautioned me against the danger of over-fatigue or excitement at meeting you. I feel certain you will pardon me. We have to be so careful against the chance of a relapse.'

'I will pardon everything, and only wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the care you have taken, and the saving of my husband's life. I shall never forget it, believe me. We shall both cherish you as a valued friend to the end of our days. And now, I will say good-bye. I suppose I may come again in the evening ?'

'Oh, certainly !—I can depute some of my duties to you with safety, at this stage.'

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From that day it may easily be understood that the patient's convalescence steadily advanced, that his progress in health was comparatively rapid. His strength, indeed, took longer to build up than he imagined would be the case. After leaving his

bed for the first time he could not walk without support, and even dressing had to be effected by easy stages. However, if the progress of gaining strength was slow, it was sure, and before the month was out he was, to use the common phrase, 'a new man.'

Then he was able to be driven round the field by his wife—to observe, and, in a sense, to enjoy the unfamiliar points of this most extraordinary region—surely one of the most amazing store-houses of the Golden Lure ever unearthed by civilised man. Though the soil was barren and rock-strewn, the rainfall scanty and uncertain, the heat of midsummer terrific, the miners had already made pathetic, not wholly unsuccessful efforts to establish gardens — a few vegetables, and the commoner sort of flowers, carefully watered, repaid their pains. Even the desert shrubs and wild flowers were heedfully transplanted, and in many instances embellished the humble homes, temporary though they might be, which sprang up in the wilderness. In some instances, where the ground was apparently all rock, holes and excavations had been blasted out and filled with alluvial, wherein the bulbs and roots put forth their shoots.

Nor was the goldfield, now so populous, and with a reputation which had been bruited over the Anglo-Saxon world, deficient in what was known as 'society people.' Not to mention the Honourable Mr. This and Lord John That, who had taken up their abode there—there were dozens of scions of well-known families from the eastern

colonies, who had not only come to take a hand in the game of Golden Hazard, here played for such alarming stakes—but who had brought their wives.

These ladies, who had heard of Mrs. Banneret, and sympathised with her in her husband's dangerous illness, 'called upon her,' as the conventional phrase runs, which visits had, of course, to be returned. So that she found herself soon provided with a large and congenial visiting-list.

'Really, I quite begin to like this place,' she said to her husband one day, when they were driving home in the cool of the evening from a centre a few miles distant from Pilot Mount, where they had heard of the presence of an old friend; 'and what a nice pony this is—quite a pleasure to drive her. The roads are so good too. Very different country from poor old Barrawong, with its box forests, and our good, clean, dear bungalow, with the old, old garden, and the dear river. Fancy a river here! The young people get to like it, I suppose—though this cemetery has a list of young—ah! such young inmates, I can't bear to think of it. Sons and brothers, wives and husbands who will never go back! It is too dreadful.'

'You must endeavour *not* to think of it, dear,' he said softly. 'You will be able to take *me* back, that is one comfort. And as the mine is doing so well—better than well—phenomenally, I think—mind you—only think—we may be able to go east, as they say here, by the mail steamer after the next. And if the "Last Chance" keeps up its

present, or probable output—we shall not return, but leave the working of it, and all business that hangs thereby, to our partners and the other shareholders.'

'Oh, what a joy that will be!' she exclaimed, clasping her hands—which, as she held the whip in one of them, caused the pony mare to make a rush. For a hundred yards or so the pony refused to be stopped, but there were neither trees nor stumps on the road, so the hotel was safely reached. The mail letters had just come in, and from these it was learned that the children were well and matters generally all that could be wished. Things being in this blissful and satisfactory state, Mr. Banneret and his wife quitted Pilot Mount, the latter in a very different state of mind from that in which she had reached it. As for her stay at the field—she thought she should look back to it (after, of course, her husband's recovery was assured) as really a most interesting and pleasant experience. Everything was so fresh and new, even to her who had been so many years a resident on goldfields. The people were, many of them, lately from Britain, America, or the Continent of Europe: all sorts of young men unattached, who had never seen Australia before, many of them of good, even aristocratic families, not occupied in any profession, eager and anxious to have their share of the treasure which Dame Nature was distributing with lavish hand; men from old colonial families, who brought their wives with them, or sent for them after they had secured an investment likely to be permanent. These were

the most solid and influential components of the hastily gathered and yet firmly welded framework of society.

They decided who among the women were to be 'called on'—or to be left out of the visiting circle. They acquired all necessary information on that head, inspected credentials, advised young men for their good—and generally constituted the higher public opinion which governed, with more or less authority, the manners and morals of their little state. They gave 'teas' at the Polo Club and race meetings, inviting desirable persons and excluding such as had given social offence. No hard and fast rule was openly promulgated, but in an unobtrusive way the combined influence made itself felt, and those who were hardy enough to withstand it found in the long run that they had taken up a wrong position.

Of course, among the heterogeneous community there were individuals and groups whose antecedents were shrouded in mystery.

All that was known of them or could be divined about their former professions or occupations, adventures, characters, or relations was that they had arrived by the mail boat of a certain date, and had been working in this alluvial claim or that reef — for the last year. They were certainly 'human warriors,' as Dickens's taxidermist was wont to express it. Mr. and Mrs. Winstanley, admittedly good-looking, well-mannered, presentable—were suspected of not being legally married.

There was no proof, either one way or the

other—if the rumour was not well founded, injustice was done to an innocent woman. If otherwise, those families who had permitted intercourse with wives and daughters repented in sackcloth and ashes when the truth came out. For it must not for one moment be assumed that the colonial social canons are one whit less rigid on such subjects than in the mother-land. If anything, Mrs. Grundy is a potentate whose power is greater and whose punishments are more terrible than in the ancestral home.

Mrs. Banneret had necessarily been drawn into closer association with Nurse Lilburne than with any other assistant in the hospital. She it was who had tended her husband through the most serious stages—the most dangerous crisis in the course of his deadly seizure. With his life actually trembling in the balance, she it was who had bathed the burning brow, had measured so carefully and administered so punctually the healing draught; had been in very truth the ministering angel of the poet's fancy. No other woman, save and excepting his own wife, could have been so capable, so delicately deft, so conscientious—so devoted, even to the danger of her own health. She had brought him through the valley of the shadow, Dr. Horton said, and he did not believe another woman in Australia—let alone in Pilot Mount—would have done it. It may be imagined what gratitude was felt by Mrs. Banneret when she saw her husband by her side, fully recovered and looking, except for a certain pallor, which some people thought became him, better than ever. Now

that they were able to drive about together—which the doctor had strongly recommended, as a daily recreation, favourable to perfect recovery—various novelties and unexpected discoveries in their new world of Arabian Nights treasure-land displayed themselves before her. Restricted to the routine of domesticity hitherto—an exacting though not unwelcome round of duties—her imagination, always daring and impatient of control, luxuriated in excursions around and amidst 'the burghers of this desert city.' What mysteries lay hidden in the past lives of the women, the men, who daily worked or strolled *en flâneur* on the highways and byways!

That quietly dressed, not quite elderly, not quite young visitor from the old country, who was he? He had a military air, and the stamp which 'formerly in the army' invariably impresses on the individual so privileged. The 'horsey man,' the abscondu, the aristocratic tourist, on for a hasty inspection, with a view to chance a thousand or two on the Big Bonanza, or the Golden Horn,—they were there. It *might* turn up trumps—like Great Wolder, which had paid a million and a half in dividends and was going strong still. Others again, who played deeply, and were chiefly undesirable.

As the field increased in population and prestige, the stream of holiday or home-going capitalists made Perth their headquarters. Once there, the 'Weld,' an exclusive and fashionable club, naturally attracted notice, and afforded a more or less luxurious home for those who desired

to enjoy their sojourn by the waters of the Swan River, and to feel the ocean breezes on a sun-tanned cheek. As an honorary or permanent member, the candidate required to be proposed and seconded by leading members of the club, who were held responsible for his conduct and character, so that it may be imagined that both were subjected to close supervision. It was not, therefore, probable that the black sheep of other lands, much less of colonial families, would find pasture, even in that Terra Incognita, a West Australian goldfield.

CHAPTER V

THERE was still, however, one haunting mystery, one problem unsolved, in the solution of which Mrs. Banneret felt more interest than in all the other uncertainties and sensational historiettes put together. Who and what was Mrs. Lilburne? Handsome, strikingly so, indeed—refined—cultured—aristocratic *au bout des ongles*; what strange movement of the hour hand of fate had brought her to the often distasteful work, the dire climatic hardships of a hospital nurse on a West Australian goldfield? Who could doubt her stainless purity who gazed on the banded hair—the calm, brave countenance, equally free from doubt or fear—the sweet, sad eyes which so rarely gave token of the spirit-light which illumined them, at rarest moments, 'like melancholy stars,' of which Mrs. Banneret said they always reminded her. Had she lost, by death, by desertion, by treachery, her soul's idol, to whom she had been vowed in happy radiant girlhood's day? What a 'phantom of delight' must she then have appeared to her social world—at that entrancing age, when 'standing with reluctant feet, where

the brook and river meet,' she had so fully realised the poet's dream!—the dream of all poets that ever strove to paint the delicious embodiment of soul and sense, the flower season of happy, innocent, loveliest girlhood.

However, it was distinctly patent to all the inquiring or admiring minds of Pilot Mount that the oracle, in the case of Nurse Lilburne's antecedents, was at present dumb, nor could cries or lamentations extract an answer. To Mrs. Banneret once, indeed, she relented so far as to say, 'Some day you will know, if to any one I may show gratitude for true friendship and womanly sympathy. In the meantime think of me only as Nurse Lilburne. For your husband I have only done what I would have done for the humblest miner. And may God grant that some day I may be counted worthy to receive payment in kind!'

So they parted on the last day of the Bannerets' sojourn on the great 'Last Chance' goldfield, as it was now called,—famed throughout all Australia as the wonderland of that Far South land which had given so many wonders and surprises to the old world, and to the country which had founded it; which a hundred years from its birth, in peril from starvation, from conquest, from criminal surroundings and ignorant misrepresentation, had established an export trade of many millions, and borne sons who fought shoulder to shoulder with Britain's best troops in defence of the Empire.

Mrs. Banneret was not the only person on the goldfields who was interested in the story of

Nurse Lilburne's life. So attractive, so exceptional a personage could not long remain in such a community, where the men outnumbered the women in the ratio of at least a hundred to one, without being admired, flattered, besieged, indeed, by importunate suitors who were only too willing to condone her past—whatever it might have been. But to all such approaches she was adamant. She quietly put them by, not coldly or haughtily, but with a nun-like aloofness, as if all matters unconnected with her duties were not only impossible of acceptance, but even of consideration. Even the most ordinary civilities, such as a seat in a buggy or pony cart to the Polo Club matches, or the races connected with the club formed for the encouragement of that fashionable game, were quietly declined, even though proffered by the president, a married man, whose wife had always been most friendly and sympathetic. Jim Allerton, whose tandem was the admiration of all beholders, implored her to honour him by accepting a seat to the ground—the day being brilliant, with a cool breeze—the occasion certain to be historical in years to come; such an opportunity would perhaps never occur again: the Governor of West Australia, with his wife and daughter, were to be present. She smiled graciously, and confessed that she could not have refused such an offer—once upon a time—but now—he must excuse her. Jim retired heartbroken, so he said.

He was not the only admirer—the Adonis of the field, Eachin Durward, a tall, handsome, grand-

looking Highlander, was known to be devoted to her,—was well-off too,—would have left for Europe *via* Cairo, and the East generally, if only she would deign to express a wish—a preference for any particular route. But she was dumb as the Sphinx.

As deaf also, to all entreaties of men, as she who sits by the Pyramids—sad, silent, awful in lonely sorrow—in wisdom unspeakable, in experience vast—in knowledge coeval with the æons, whose memorial—save of her, and the eternal pyramidal monuments—hath perished.

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Eastward ho! Home again,—blessed word, thrice blessed reality. The hot desert blast—the dust—the heat—the swarming flies—the glaring sun at noon—the scarce less tyrannous heat at even,—all things that bore so hard on frail humanity—all left behind for a season! What a paradise of hope and joy seemed opening before the 'happy pair,' in truest re-adjusted sense of the word. And the calm, peaceful savour of all the best joys of life was heightened by the recurring thought that under all things there was the solid foundation of success—success undoubted—ungrudged—won by enterprise and work, a wide-spread treasure-house in which so many of the most honest toilers of earth were permitted, nay, invited to share.

With health assured—indeed benefited by recovery from the dread fever-grip—so rarely relaxed—it seemed apparent that he, Arnold Banneret, 'never looked better,' as his friends assured him, than on his return from the Golden

West—that fateful Eldorado which numbered so many of the best and noblest of Australia's—Britain's—sons among the 'unreturning brave.'

The voyage completed — the harbour — the haven par excellence of all fair havens, regained, the meeting on the wharf—of the entire family—wild with joy, and shouting all kinds of differing information, in one breath—all rosy with health and frantic with delight, may be left to be imagined by those home-returning parents of similar experiences. Nothing had gone wrong. The household had been discreetly, lovingly, capably managed in the absence of the high-contracting parties of the little state,—that state, when multiplied by thousands and ten thousands, which makes so much in valour, virtue, and stability, in the onward march of Empire.

Again established in their most comfortable house, on one of the heights which overlooked the harbour on the winding highway to the South Head—a dream of beauty by day or starlit night, by sweet moonrise or palest dawn — unequalled, unapproachable beneath the Southern Cross—how pure, how peaceful, how unspeakable was their happiness! What avenues of enjoyment opening out daily, stretching in the future to illimitable distance, filled the perspective!

The New Holland Club, of which Mr. Banneret had for many years been a member, again opened its arms to receive the absent member, whom they thought never again to behold. Reports had reached them that he was dead—not expected to survive, what not? It is not a wholly unpleasant

sensation to personally contradict the report of one's decease, — that report, 'upon the best authority,' quoted from the morning papers, that one has been cut off in the flower of one's youth, or the zenith of one's fame, as the case may be. Even there the candid friend is not wholly at a disadvantage. 'No idea that I was such a fine fellow,' says Horatio, returning, let us say, from Philippi, where he was reported slain. 'Really,' drawls the inevitable 'friend,' 'but, you know, dear boy, people exaggerate so fearfully on such occasions!'

It is good to be rich, for some, for many reasons. It is good even to be thought rich, if one is not thereby tempted to spend extravagantly. As mankind are constituted, whether the money is inherited, gained by accident, by the hardly reputable means of gambling, so long as it is known to be there, a certain kind of respect and deference goes along with its possession. Perhaps in Arnold Banneret's case, whose exploration of an inhospitable desert where men's lives were but as counters in the game, and had been expended as recklessly, it disposed the critics of the clubs and swagger hotels to regard him as having achieved true distinction. Younger sons and others, who had gone out with hazy ideas of digging a fortune out of the dreary wastes, of which they had heard, and had returned to the city without one, comprehended the preliminary hardships which he must have undergone. They enlarged upon these, in all good faith, until the readers of newspapers and the public generally were disposed to look upon him as

a general of Division and a scientific millionaire combined.

'Heard of him before,' men would say in the smoking room. 'Been at the front all his life. Squatter in old days—took up outside country—rows with blacks—bushrangers, that sort of man. Dropped his money when stock went down. Took to the Civil Service later on. Wife and children—so on. Makes up his mind to be Goldfields Warden—tired of that—believed in another cast of the dice—goes to W.A.—and before he's been there a month, hits on the discovery of the age—the biggest of the century—regular Mount Morgan, y'know.'

'Mayn't be quite as big a quarry as that,' interposes another man — a pastoralist, whose grizzled beard and bronzed countenance has 'Waste Lands of the Crown' writ large thereon —'but told by men, been there and seen, half a dozen fortunes in it,' and so on, and so on. Thus the hero-worship progressed.

Rich—beyond any of *his* dreams of avarice—so far, he saw himself so high on the ladder of prosperity that he began to consider how he might benefit those friends and relations (perhaps) whom he had so often pitied, lamenting at the same time his inability to aid them. It was one of the anomalies of life, he had reflected, that people in possession of superfluous means seldom showed much disposition to use them in this way; while those who, like himself, would have taken pleasure in dispensing timely aid seldom had the wherewithal to gratify benevolent intentions. However,

if the future yields of the 'Last Chance' kept up its present rate, there would be enough, and to spare, for years to come. He could enact the Uncle from India—they are always rich (or used to be)—for the benefit of deserving relations who would be touchingly grateful to the end of their lives. How he could assist all benevolent institutions—repay those who had been kind to him in the early struggles of his life! He had a good memory for such positions and people. Then, after a few years, which he could spend comfortably, not to say luxuriously, in Sydney—he would take the family to England. The boys would be of an age to benefit by public-school training, preparatory to being entered at Oxford or Cambridge. He would buy an estate—not too large, but sufficiently so, to give them the pleasures of English country life, without the drawbacks of having to attend to the responsibilities and details of a large estate. He might even go into parliament—that was to be managed more easily in the old country than in the new one, where the low suffrage, combined with the intense jealousy which wealth and a cultured intellect aroused in the lower-class voters, made it difficult, if not impossible, for their possessor to enter parliament. However, these hopes and enterprises were for the future to justify and develop in action. For the present here was he, Arnold Banneret, back again in Sydney—safe and sound, fully recovered from the fever scourge of outside habitations—wife and children well—heartily enjoying his recovered freedom from anxiety, the society of his friends, and

in a moderate way the prestige which had accrued to him as a favourite of fortune, and a successful, energetic, worthy recipient of her gifts.

Of the good things now so lavishly bestowed upon them his wife had her full share. Always ready to indulge her with such pleasures as he could afford, and knowing well that in the matter of expenditure she was far more prudent, as well as practical, than himself—he had relinquished to her willingly in his official days the power to draw on a separate bank account, into which his pay as it came in was deposited. From this she was expected to provide for household expenses—dress—schooling—all things needful for their station in life. He contracted to discharge his private personal expenses,—having subsidiary grants, such as coroners' and other fees, travelling allowances for the long rides and drives he was obliged to take in connection with mining matters, the settlement of disputes about claims, or reports on the sale of auriferous lands: in fact, upon the thousand and one matters only to be settled satisfactorily by the presence and judicial action of the resident magistrate.

Now, of course, Mrs. Banneret's bank account was increased—enlarged upon a scale commensurate with the imposing amounts which regularly arrived from the goldfield of Balgowrie in the district of Sturt, in the colony of West Australia. Like most married women, the spending of money gratified her, more especially when she had no doubt of the solvency of the bank account, and the propriety of the manner in which it was dis-

bursed. That the children should be well and handsomely dressed, as became their station in life, was to her a matter not only of right and justice, but of keen enjoyment. That they were enabled to join in such entertainments as were suited to their age, and station in life, was also a part of her satisfaction. They had often, in former days, been denied these innocent pleasures—to her secret mortification. Now and henceforth this disability was abrogated for all future time.

How very delightful it all was! What a glorious thing was life! (Of course there were drawbacks—but they must be expected.) Here Arnold Banneret's mind reverted to that little hospital at Pilot Mount, to the delirious patient in one bed—suspected in lucid intervals to be himself—to Nurse Lilburne's grave, compassionate face—to the dead miner but two beds away—to the empty couch, which had been occupied last night!

Thinking of such things, a wave of deep and earnest gratitude to the Lord and Giver of Life for a while took possession of all his faculties, to the exclusion of all merely pleasurable sensations. While sitting in the broad, flower-wreathed verandah, as the evening shadows deepened into those of night, and looking over the waveless water-plain of the harbour, lit up from time to time by the lights of passing steamers—the silence broken but by their warning bells—the deep blue heavens, star fretted, and but faintly luminous in the southern midnight—the hands of the husband and wife stole together; for they were lovers still,

though so long wedded. 'Oh, Arnold!' said the wife, 'is not this a fragment of Paradise, after what we have gone through, and do you think it will—it *can* last? I feel almost too happy. God has indeed answered our prayers—in many an eventide it has been light, but this is the crown—the glory of all our life!'

'That we have fought our fight fairly—through good and evil hap—I think we are entitled to say, though humbly; and thankfully do I acknowledge God's mercy and goodness in the troubled times of our married life. But it really looks now as if peace was declared, and the war was over. Let us trust so, and hope that in time to come, as in the past, a hand may be stretched out to save in time of need. May our children who have their lives before them, with all their trials and dangers, be not less happy, less fortunate than we have been!'

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Years passed on. The family of Banneret had become accustomed to living at the rate of four or five thousand a year—not by any means so difficult a task as declining from that desirable income to as many hundreds. They were accredited members of the 'Upper Ten,' as translated into Australian Society terms.

Their parents having belonged to well-known colonial families, the young people found themselves invited to all the gaieties going. They had many old friends and relatives—some in influential positions—who stood loyally by them, so that in all the more desirable festivities, from a Government House ball or garden party, to the

annual regatta in the harbour, the available members of the family were always in the front rank. Races, hunt clubs, tennis matches—golf—water parties—theatricals—church and hospital bazaars,—they enjoyed them all: in moderation, be it spoken, always. There was no reckless abandonment to pleasure, no love of excitement for that reason only. But their temperaments held a strong infusion of *la joie de vivre*, which, along with energy and intelligence above the average, rendered it possible for them to combine much healthy recreation with a reasonable outlook on the great issues of life. The mild but firm parental rule was always available to restrain enthusiasm, to check impulsive imprudence. Thus all things progressed satisfactorily, in an apparently well-balanced mean between comfort and extravagance.

All reasonable indulgence in the pleasures of youth for the young people, with the calm satisfactions of middle age for the seniors, seemed assured. Not only for the present, but for years in advance, their position was unassailable by fate. Mrs. Banneret, to be sure, could not help suggesting from time to time, in a mild, tentative way, that they were *too* happy, the sky was too bright, the outlook too fair to last—something adverse *must* happen—it was unnatural that this fairyland, lotos-eating state of matters should remain unchanged!

'My dear,' he would make answer, 'surely you are not going to take the part of the—a—what's-his-name—at the feast. Must I hire a slave to repeat at intervals, "Arnold Banneret, thou art mortal"?

I have never been unthankful for the blessings which in God's great mercy have been showered upon us. My whole being is permeated with thankfulness. In our small way we have done good according to our lights, in the way of charity and benevolence, to our fellow-creatures. But I decline to be apprehensive, in advance of disaster—for which I may state that I shall not be wholly unprepared. If it comes, we can stand up to it, as we have done before—more than once—without repining or presumption. In the meantime let us enjoy ourselves while we may.'

It was strange—passing strange—as the members of this family had occasion to reflect full many a time and oft, in the aftertime—that immediately after this conversation the great banking disaster which smote cities, towns, villages, throughout Australia, broke like a tidal wave over the land. Ancient mercantile institutions—time-honoured banks—mortgage and agency companies—loan and building companies felt the blow Banks on deposit, offering high rates of interest, while chiefly unsound, swept thousands of the lesser investors into a whirlpool of ruin. Fine old crusted banks, whose solvency had never been questioned, were whelmed in one common cataclysm.

A panic set in. After the first few banks and loan agencies fell, other banks and institutions hitherto unquestioned thought it good policy to go down before the blast in good company, and so profit by the general overthrow to reconstruct. This latter process consisted in writing off as great a volume of inconvenient liabilities as the share-

holding public would permit, without too great an outcry, and starting on a new, unencumbered career—free from vexatious hindrance or liability. They were much in the position of the deeply laden bark that in stormy weather, amid mountainous seas, jettisons the cargo, the weight of which may disturb buoyancy at a critical moment. It is not asserted that all interest due on deposits or debentures was sacrificed. It went into a reserve fund of deferred payments, which, after a decent interval, were eventually paid up. But many of the humbler depositors lost the savings of years, and this was the hardest part of all—being no longer able to pay the calls which were necessary for the financial existence of the institution in question. Perhaps this unsparing treatment, though apparently harsh to individuals, was the safer policy. And at this eventful period, when long-trusted financial houses in Britain tottered to their fall, the Premier of the oldest Australian colony, himself a native-born Australian, took the strong, perhaps unprecedented step of declaring bank-notes to be a legal tender. To the ordinary citizen, much more to the rural depositor, a bank-note had always represented ready cash.

The movement was well timed. It inspired confidence and calmed the apprehension of general as well as individual wreck and ruin. In a sister colony the Government of the day, with paternally indulgent policy, directed all banks to close for three days—presumably to permit time for declaration of a policy. All the banks availed themselves of this, with the exception of *four*, who refused to

comply with the quasi-royal edict. Three of them were old and long-established—coeval almost with the birth of the colony and the infancy of the commercial system. The fourth was comparatively new and unknown. Yet it rode out the gale as gallantly as its more dignified compeers. The news was communicated to Mr. Banneret with startling suddenness by one of his schoolboy sons, who, returning from town at lunch time, it being the holiday season, greeted him with the question, 'Father, have you heard the news?'

'No; what is it?'

'The Bank of New Holland has stopped payment.'

'What? The Bank—*that* Bank! Impossible! Are you sure?'

'Well, Jack Burton's brother is accountant. He told me; some of the other fellows knew about it. And the door's shut. I went to look. Burton says lots of other ones will stop. They are refusing bank-notes at the railway.'

Mr. Banneret groaned. 'And is this the end of my life's work?' he thought—'a bolt from the blue, and so on. Well, it's lucky I put that thirty thousand into the British "Reduced Counsels," as Mr. Weller, senr., called them. Rum time to fall back on Dickens, isn't it? Might find a worse author, though. We shall have to adopt "Reduced Counsels" literally, it appears. Tell your mother I want her.'

His countenance informed that good wife and

trusty mother that *something* had happened out of the common track of surprises.

'What is it? Anything the matter with Reggie and Rosamond?' They were on their way to England by the P. & O. boat *Ispahan*.

'Well, nothing very serious; but there's a difficulty about money.'

'Is that all? How did it come about? No imprudence, I hope?'

'Not on Reggie's part. Read his cable—short and strong: "*Credit stopped. Please arrange.*"'

'How did it happen? I feel so relieved. Money's nothing, compared with health, or accident. I thought Reggie might be ill, or hurt. But tell me.'

'The main facts are, that all the banks in Sydney, beginning with the Eastern, have stopped payment, provisionally at present, pending reconstruction, liquidation, or some other delayed arrangement, the immediate effect of which is, that nobody can get any money just at present.'

'What—none at all? Whatever shall we do?'

'I daresay I can manage a small advance. I put thirty thousand pounds into British Consols, as a stand-by in case of accidents. So we can pay the butcher and baker, at any rate.'

'But the mine hasn't stopped?'

'No, thank God! It's a pity I banked the last month's dividend, though. It's going better than ever. So, when next month's comes in, I can put it into a trust account. Meanwhile I have wired a draft for £500 to Reggie.'

'Poor things! It must have given them a cruel shock.'

'Yes, indeed; but some of their fellow-passengers must have had a worse one. Hard lines to have to come back when they were half-way home, like the Thompsons and Franklins. Poor Mrs. Franklin! She was only telling me last week what a round of the Continent she and the girls proposed.'

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This cyclonic disturbance abated in time; matters moved on again in their accustomed order. But there were wrecks left behind—mercantile, moral, and political—which no future prosperity could re-establish. Long was it indeed before the fatal year of 18— was even partially restored, much less forgotten. But, as Mrs. Banneret truly said, 'Money counts as nothing in family history compared with health.' And this was only a temporary inconvenience, as the Bank of New Holland paid up all liabilities eventually, with interest up to date. Paterfamilias betook himself to one of the banks which had weathered the storm, and found that with the promise of removing the account of the 'Last Chance' Gold Mining Company to their long-established corporation, he could have practically all the money he needed. Which was certainly satisfactory. So the Banneret family went on their way rejoicing, and denied themselves, as 'before the war,' nothing in reason. The younger boys and girls went to high-class schools, as before; learned all the extras and accomplishments; played football, tennis, hockey,

and cricket; rowed and yachted in the harbour; took the whole round of exercises in mind and body for which no people in the British Empire are more eager than the youthful Australian.

It was now nearly five years since Arnold Banneret had seen the mine—the centre and source of the family fortunes. He had been kept fully posted up in its progress and development, in the size and splendour of the city which had arisen around Pilot Mount, the grand scheme of water supply which had been successfully completed, the electric lighting of public and private buildings, streets, etc., but he thought it advisable to have personal evidence as to all these wonders and miracles. Besides, he was getting rather tired of the almost too easy and prosperous routine of his daily life. Travel had always been the very breath of his nostrils, the very salt and savour of his life. He would try the tonic again.

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How different were all things from the rude discomfort of his first visit!—the earlier stages and stopping-places grown from camps to villages, from villages to towns, from towns to cities having mayors and aldermen; telegraph and post offices, court-houses and churches, in almost, as the newly arrived traveller considered, unnecessary profusion. However, the gold returns had kept up—that was the main, the chief consideration. This month's return from the field had been the largest yet. Other centres of gold production had been discovered, and were advancing along the road to riches and recognition. There had been cases of

excessive capitalisation, of course; but nothing that had in any way trenched upon the reputation or resources of the parent mine.

Arnold Banneret arrived late, and preferred to dine and sleep at the Palace Hotel—as, of course, the leading caravanserai at the city was named.

Here, though partly prepared for a series of surprises, he was genuinely amazed at the luxurious details of the apartments and the comparative excellence of the cuisine: fresh fish brought daily by train from the coast, packed in ice; fruit forwarded in the same way; the duly-kept saddle of mutton—the sirloin,—all good of their kind. Though the tariff savoured rather of a recent war, the retiring traveller was not disposed to find fault. The service generally was good, the attendance most creditable. Having slept the sleep of the just (and the tired-out), and arranged for an early breakfast, he left for Pilot Mount in a hired buggy, behind a pair of fresh, well-groomed horses.

A hot climate has its days of tyranny and oppression, but there are compensating advantages —even in summer. By leaving shortly after sunrise, you secure a sample of climate which is little short of perfection,—especially, as in this particular experience, where there is no wind. The sun appeared to be slowly, almost imperceptibly, disengaging his golden sphere from the mists and vapours of the lower world, and as he rose regally from his couch, all nature appeared to welcome the life-giving presence of the fire-worshipping god. Far as eye could see, over the mighty sweep

of plain that stretched to the horizon, were the evidences of recent occupation, more or less connected with the great industry which had lured the army of toilers, that Mr. Banneret saw before him, into the gold-seekers' ranks—some destined to fortune, some to poverty, sickness, and death. In his own case, how nearly had his career come to an untimely end! His heart swelled with thankfulness as he remembered the hospital experiences—the lonely boding days, the faithful watchers by his couch, the unspeakable relief of convalescence.

As he neared the monolith which had been the pillar of hope and guidance in his journey through the wilderness, he was conscious of a certain feeling of disappointment in noting the comparatively small size of the encampment round the mine. He had expected a township of larger proportions, and had not reckoned on the attraction of the Great Aqueduct, recently completed, which will always stand as a monument to the courage and foresight of the Minister who planned and carried it through to successful fulfilment. May he live to crown his life-work with the completion of that other great undertaking with which his name will be always indissolubly connected! Worthily and suitably should the name be venerated, as of one who, himself a son of the soil, had, as an explorer, dared the perils of that waterless desert region.

Not being tied to time on this occasion, and having the satisfaction of seeing all things going well with the mine, Mr. Banneret permitted himself a season of leisure and recreation, so to speak,

which suited his personal tastes. He carefully inspected the machinery and general working of the 'Reward Claim,' as among the mining community it was generally known; the hundred head of stamps, the Diehl process of extraction, which inexorably dragged the last grain of the precious metal from the crushed rock. The wages men, the shift, and underground 'boss,' respectively and individually, were carefully noted and interviewed by him. Practised in the art of eliciting information and making acquaintance with the various and heterogeneous population of a goldfield, he from time to time noted, quietly and unobtrusively, many of the leaders and men of mark in the community. The results of this inquiry, he deemed, might be of value to him in time to come.

In his peregrinations he met with many individuals whom he had known or heard of under different circumstances. The majority of these were unaffectedly pleased to see him—even, rather to his surprise, some of those to whom he had been compelled officially to award pains and penalties. This seemed to make no difference in the cordiality of their recognition. Offenders under such circumstances rarely bear malice, as long as they believe in the justice and impartiality of the decision. The criminal classes, as a body, do not harbour revengeful feelings against administrators of justice. Their common expression is: 'It's the law, and it's his business to carry it out. It's all in the day's work.' True, they do not approve of the official 'going out of his way' to

arrest a convict. To any ordinary advantage, taken in pursuit or capture, they do not object. 'It's his business to run us in, and ours to get away,' they admit. 'But he ought to play the game.' If he fails in this particular, they conspire to be revenged. And as colonial history tells us, they are prone to inflict terrible vengeance in such cases.

It was strangely interesting in its way for the retired magistrate—so unobtrusive of dress and manner, as he rambled from camp to camp in the early mornings or late afternoons, when the wind had ceased and the sun had lost his fiercer rays—to come across the men or women whom he had known under such different conditions of life and occupation in the long-dead days of his earlier life. Some had risen curiously high, while others had fallen unspeakably low.

It was pathetic to mark the sudden gleam of recognition, impossible to suppress, that lit up the eyes, and for an instant transformed the features of the 'old hand,' well known—*too* well known, in fact—to the police of more than one colony; the half-humble, half-defiant change of manner, as if to say, 'I am free now, and unless I get into fresh "trouble" neither you nor any living man can touch me.'

To such he made a point of speaking a few words, such as, 'Doing well, Connor? Fine field this? Anything fresh turned up?' Whatever the answer, it would merely mean that he, the Commissioner, the man of dread and awful powers in days gone by, had simply recognised him: that

it depended wholly upon his future conduct whether that fact would tend to his injury. More than one of such former acquaintances sought him out at his hotel, and trusted that he would not 'put the police' on him. He was earning an honest living, and sending money to his wife and family in Melbourne, Sydney, or Hobart, as the case might be. 'My good fellow,' Mr. Banneret would reply, 'as long as you behave yourself, I would much rather that you did well than not. You are getting another chance here, far away from people that know you and what you have been. It is no business of mine to inform the police, or any one else. Don't drink; work hard—I know you can do *that*—and see that your people in Melbourne are not starving while you're living comfortably here.'

'No fear, sir! I sent 'em twenty pound last mail.' So the man of a chequered career went back to his tent with his heart lightened, and a renewed resolve to go straight and reform—if indeed such a changing of spots of the proverbial member of the carnivora were possible. Sometimes he did, sometimes he didn't. In any case his heart was softened, and the impulse to a better life, faint though it might have been, was distinct.

One day he came upon a claim of four men's ground at which the shareholders had evidently been working hard, judging by the size of their 'tip.' The men on top were, apparently, new arrivals, judging by their fresh complexions and ruddy faces.

'Now, Sailor Bill!' said the taller man, 'what are you a-thinkin' of?—the clapper's gone twice

—to haul up. Dick Andrews 'll know you're wool-gathering agin, same as you was when you lowered the bucket yesterday, without puttin' the "sprag" in, and nearly finished him.'

'Hang Dick, and you too! I was a-thinkin' if it was true as I seen in the paper—as the p'leece was agoin' to make a raid, as they call it, upon the runaway sailors on the field here. There's a goodish lot, you know. They won't get me. Afore I'd go home in that old tub as I come out in, with that devil of a skipper and his mate as is worse, I'd chuck myself down the deepest hole in the field, and make an end of it.'

'Better show them cornstalk fellers, as they call theirselves, that an Englishman can do any work as they can, and handle any tools. It don't do to let 'em have the laugh at us, Bill.'

'Well, I'll give my mind a bit closer to it after this, but the chaps work like navvies—and it's not the only trade they've larnt, I can see. Wonder what they've been at afore they come here?—there's summat queer about 'em, I'll swear.'

'Don't know and don't care. They're hard-workin' smart hands at mining work—and that's all we care about. There goes the double clapper—it's dinner time.'

Up came the bucket to the brace, with the man referred to as 'Dick' therein—a tall man, fully six feet in height, or perhaps an inch over. He was well made, though he carried but little flesh, and had the air of being fully acquainted with mining and pastoral matters. He wore a beard, with a full moustache hiding his mouth

and withholding the expression of his face from the casual observer.

He spoke with the drawling intonation peculiar to the natives of New South Wales, more especially those reared in the country towns of the interior. His features were regular, his eyes grey and apparently unobservant, though, like those of other races remote from cities and the haunts of men, there were few objects, or incidents, which were not quickly and comprehensively revealed to their vision. The countenance was impassive, as of a man who was not desirous of imparting his thoughts to chance comrades, and at the same time too little interested in the minor matters of life to furnish conversation about them. His hair and beard, of a fair or light brown hue, were streaked with grey. Verging upon middle age, he was probably a few years older, though the activity which he showed when roused to exertion forbade the idea. Indifferent and careless as to surroundings as he appeared to the ordinary observer, there was a hint of calm watchfulness about his air and lounging pose which, as of a hunter in 'Injun country,' conveyed the idea that it would be difficult to take him by surprise.

The Commissioner looked fixedly at him. The man returned his gaze with a quiet steadiness, at once remote from fear or defiance, yet as one ready for the next movement, whether hostile or pacific.

'I see you know me, sir,' said the man; 'it's a good few years since we met last. You won't give me away?'—and here the expression changed

to that of a hunted creature, which, driven into the last stronghold, has yet the defiant courage of the wolf quarry amid the baying hounds.

'My good fellow, you don't suppose I bother myself about likenesses for all the people I've met during the last twenty years. I may have seen you, or some one like you, before; but I'm a mine-owner now, and I don't know that I could swear to you positively. But *if* you've done anything in another colony, under another name, that has brought you into trouble with the police, don't get into any scrapes here; and if ever you're arrested again, it won't be through me, mind that.'

'God bless you, sir!' said the man. 'You've not changed. If I'm "copped" again, it won't matter, for I'll be a dead man.'

Mr. Banneret walked away—rather hastily, as though he could not trust himself to say more. 'Poor devil!' he said to himself—almost audibly—'I wonder how he will end? The odds are a hundred to one against him; that's a good paying claim, I hear, and he may—only *may*—save up his share. He's afraid to drink for fear of letting out secrets—there's a price on his head too—a big reward—which some of his own "friends" wouldn't mind handling. Well, there's the last of the lawless lot. "'Tis pity of him too," as the Douglas said.' It was rather past the hour of the mid-day meal when he regained Pilot Mount, and his face still wore an expression of doubt, almost of anxiety, as he entered the tent, where Mr. Newstead's lively chatter, and Southwater's more serious observations about business matters, and the probable

month's 'clean up,' chased the cloud from his brow.

Not only smoothly, but on the crest of the wave of prosperity, with fair wind, and every sail set, sped on the 'Last Chance'—that argosy in special favour with gods and men.

CHAPTER VI

An unusually large 'clean up' was expected for the Christmas month ; bets had been made that no yield in Australia would rival it. It was to go down by private escort, that is, by the waggonette belonging to the lease, which would be driven by one of the men employed in the mine, who was a relation of the chief shareholder, and had turned up a few months since. He had been out of luck lately, but being a remarkably good all-round man, a noted bushman, and 'as hard as nails,' preferred work as an ordinary hand on the mine to doing nothing, and was earning his £3 or £4 a week by manual labour. Among his accomplishments—and he had many—were the arts of riding and driving. Everything belonging to the use and education of 'the noble animal' had been familiar to him since childhood. It was therefore arranged that he should take charge of a four-in-hand team with the precious cargo from Pilot Mount to the nearest railway station ; and, with Newstead, who would embrace that opportunity of 'going home,' be responsible for the gold until delivered to the Master of the Mint.

All necessary arrangements were made—the solid, iron-clamped boxes, heavy to lift, mysterious and secret of appearance, were duly weighed, counted, and placed ready to go into the body of the strong though light-running vehicle.

In the early days of the vast goldfields, where now a city stands, with ten thousand inhabitants, having shops and buildings, water supply, electric power and light, the value of each consignment of gold to the 'port' was accurately known. There were people who considered this to be imprudent, inasmuch as the fact of there being from thirty to fifty thousand pounds' worth of gold on any given vehicle, with only four or six men as a defence force, would operate as a powerful temptation to a class of criminals well represented on any rich goldfield. But nothing in the way of violent spoliation had taken place so far. The waterless character of the country had been against highway robbery, rendering such enterprises less difficult to interrupt or follow up. Still, experienced police officers held the opinion that it might not always be so. Miners and companies had grown careless, by reason of the offences at present being confined to trifling sums and localities in the city. It was well known that criminals of the class of 'Long Jack,' 'The Nugget,' and 'The Gipsy' were on the field—daring, not to say desperate men—with a long list of convictions behind them; ready to stick at nothing when a robbery of the first class, such as they would term 'a big touch,' might be brought off. A clever disguise, with a ticket for the mail steamer, would land the actors far away

from all chance of arrest. There were good police and sharp detectives around Pilot Mount, but up to this stage of the field their energies had been comparatively wasted.

Compared with the more important tragedies from time to time enacted in New South Wales and Queensland, the 'Golden Belt,' as the auriferous district had been named, was wonderfully free from the higher developments of criminal activity. This, however, in the opinion of the Chief Commissioner of the police department, could not be expected to continue. As the output of gold, increasing in value and volume, swelled the monthly reports, while as yet no adequate scheme of defence had been organised, the more satisfied was he that a novel and original raid on the treasure claim might at any moment be looked for. Perhaps even now one might be maturing.

In the meantime, the start for the coast could not come off for several days, which were devoted to preparing for the important journey. The waggonette was carefully examined : wheels, axles, and springs tested — in some cases strengthened, as a breakdown on the road would be a serious affair, and repairs difficult, if not impossible, to effect. Nearly a week was devoted to this needful precautionary work. In the meanwhile, the English mail steamer had arrived at Fremantle, and among the letters forwarded to Arnold Banneret, Pilot Mount, 'Last Chance Mine,' was an offer from an influential Syndicate, with more than one noble, world-renowned name upon the Committee, to purchase the right, title, and interest of the adjoining

leases, including the Reward Claim of that name. The Prospectus was elaborate, setting forth that the large yields of the past foreshadowed an even more stupendous income in the future. It pointed out that the management might be simplified, and working expenses reduced, by association with a group of well-known dividend-paying mines, already owned, or controlled, by the Syndicate, while the profits would be proportionately increased, and the dividends accruing to shareholders might be confidently stated to be such as no modern mine, with the exception of Mount Morgan, in Queensland, had ever touched. Of course it would be necessary to issue a largely increased number of shares, the capital value of which would run into millions, but the guarantee of 'The Southern World Associated Gold Mines Companies' would, while assuring shareholders of unusual dividends, make the shares negotiable at their face value all over the English-speaking world. The present shareholders would receive 500,000 shares—present value £500,000—with £100,000 in cash,—estimated to represent one-half of the value of the mine. If the present monthly output remained stationary, the dividends would be exceptional. But if, as was almost certain, they were increased proportionately to the improved machinery and up-to-date management proposed to be inaugurated without delay, there would not be an investment in Australia or South Africa which would bear comparison with it.

This proposal, when all mining property was

going up by leaps and bounds, met with the fullest support from all the local, and indeed the colonial press generally. It seemed from the eulogistic notices which poured in from all sides, British, foreign, and provincial, as if any man or woman, with a capital exceeding a ten-pound note, must be wanting in ordinary intelligence, criminally indifferent to the interests of his family, of the colony in which he dwelt, or the Empire to which he owed fealty, if he or she did not immediately take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to enrich himself and his family, his friends and his countrymen.

This proposal, however, did not find favour in the eyes of the principal shareholder. He had seen the decline and fall of so many magnificent projects—over-capitalised, and 'boomed' up to highly speculative if not fictitious values, with flattering reports and favourable surveys, dwelling more upon the visions of the future than the facts of the present. They had soared to an aerial height, only to waver, and finally, after irregular gyrations, fell to rise no more, involving all connected with the enterprise in ruinous loss, besides damaging the reputation of solid, legitimate mining properties. He preferred to accept the honestly earned profits of the mine, carefully worked and safely managed ; issuing monthly reports, regularly supplied to the press, and open to all men for general information. He placed his views so strongly before the shareholders and partners in the 'Last Chance Proprietary Mine, Limited,' at a special meeting summoned to decide upon the

offer of the Syndicate referred to, that it was respectfully declined.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile the city, which had grown and flourished around the once bare, solitary Pilot Mount, had reached a stature—a transformation, indeed, resembling one of the dream-cities of the Eastern story-teller,—broad streets, bright with electric lamps, and gardens watered by an aqueduct fed from a reservoir miles distant. Thronged, too, with every kind of vehicle, every kind of beast of burden; every kind of horse, from the Clydesdale to the thoroughbred, from the dog-cart trotter to the polo pony; bullock teams and camel trains jostled one another; while well-horsed coaches daily, hourly indeed, brought mails and passengers from distant gold-fields and lately discovered 'rushes.' These last were often founded upon 'Great Expectations,' which too often proved unsubstantial, if not illusory. Nevertheless, progress *was* made notwithstanding; and the monthly output remains to testify to the stability of the Great Industry, energy of the population, and the increasing richness of the auriferous area. Wonderful hotels, livery stables containing saddle-horses sufficient to remount a squadron, arose on every side, with race-courses and polo grounds where the young bloods of the 'field' disported themselves—where, indeed, such prizes as the Golden Belt Handicap, value one thousand pounds—second horse, two hundred, were competed for. All these, and other wonders and marvels, had been produced—had arisen

literally *out of the earth*—the auriferous earth—so miraculously productive, by methods compared with which the ancient processes of the sower and the reaper were contemptibly ineffective. Think of a month's output such as this!

. . . . . .

It was the evening before the great event. Every one in the camp had been working at high pressure since daylight. All things had been arranged—all hindrances foreseen and provided for. The horses, well fed and well groomed, were tried, staunch, and equal to long stages at a high rate of speed. In addition to Arnold Banneret, Newstead, and the acting coachman, another personage had been granted a seat after consultation with old Jack. This was the miner Dick Andrews, who had urgent private reasons for getting to Perth, and made petition to Mr. Banneret to that end. Having, as he told that gentleman in a conversation a few days previously, fallen upon a stroke of luck, he was anxious to leave West Australia, and, taking his wife and children with him, to settle in the Argentine, where, among people who had neither seen nor heard of him before, he might lead a new life, and cut himself clear of old ties and associations.

'I've nigh on five hundred ounces in this bag, sir,' he said, 'and if you'll have it put up with your lot you can hold it as security, like, till you're banking your own. It's been weighed all right, and there's Mr. Stewart's handwriting along with it in the wash-leather bag. I don't read, nor write either, as you know—more's the pity—but

I seen him take it from the scales, and write on it, and seal it up all reg'lar. Life's uncertain (as the parson says), and our lot's not the sort to make old bones. I'd trust you, Commissioner, with my life. It's no great odds off that now, I reckon. And you'll stand by me now, won't you? I've been a bad chap, but I've not had much of a chance. A little thing would have turned me on the right track—and that little I didn't get. You never knowed me do anything crooked, sir? and the shootin' racket was straightforrard between man and man.'

'I don't know that I'm doing right, Dick, in helping you off the field this way, but I saw your wife and the boy and girl at Southern Cross. I'll chance it for their sakes — I've heard you were always good to them.'

The man called 'Dick' did not speak—perhaps the words would not come—but as he turned his head away with an indistinct murmur, a keen observer might have seen in those eyes, which had looked so often upon danger, and fronted Death unfalteringly, an unfamiliar moisture—scarcely to be distinguished from a tear.

The day closed murkily, and with a faint pretence of storm and shower, such as, on a hundred former occasions, had resulted in the usual disappointment to the dwellers in that sun-scorched land. Wind probably, thought the Camp generally, or perhaps a 'Darling River shower'—four drops upon five acres! Meanwhile the sky grew black, the air became heavy, the sultry heat oppressive—appearances such as in

any other land would have immediately preceded a thunderstorm, with a fall of rain: an unspoken call to the elements to clear the air and relieve the o'erburdened senses; but none answered. Gradually the clouds dispersed, the sun receded below the dim, distant horizon, and, save the occasional flicker of sheet-lightning, nothing remained as result of the portentous threatening which so lately seemed to disturb the illimitable waste, hardly less solitary, save for this ephemeral gathering, than the unbounded sea.

The evening meal had been long concluded. The different groups sat smoking, or conversing in low tones. The skies were again clear, and the heavenly host lit up the dark-blue firmament, throwing a kindly mantle over the homelier features of the desolate levels upon which the Pilot Mount looked down.

Mr. Newstead was calmly smoking, and playing with his pet fox-terrier, a well-bred animal, boasting a pedigree from distinguished English prize-winners. 'Yes, Minniekins,' said he, 'I'm going home, and you're going too, first cabin. Isn't it a lark? don't think I ever saw a dog of your age show so much class. You'll scoop all the prizes in our County Show next year—if you don't get sea-sick and ruin your constitution, as some passengers do. Won't we have a jolly time when we see Old England, eh, Minniekins? You've never seen grass yet, y'know, nor rain either. That sounds droll, doesn't it? You're only two years old, and it rains once in five years here, don't y'know? Droll country—no rain, no

grass, no grain ; grows nothing but gold. That's good enough, though. Won't we talk to them when we get to the little village, eh? Now what are *you* thinking of, Minniekins — smelling a nigger, or a dingo? No camels in sight. What is it? I can see you're nervous—what an excitable little woman it is! You mustn't bite the butcher again, or we'll be brought before the beak for keeping a ferocious dog, don't y'know?'

The terrier raised herself quietly, and stood looking out into the starlit night. She was a remarkably intelligent animal, much attached to her master, who had given a fancy price for her, and often stated that a plainer dog in England, of her class, had cost him £50. She stretched her neck, as if looking for something, and gave vent to a low, querulous whine. Still uneasy, she continued to exhibit the same anxious air of disapproval, though, as yet, not committing herself to the arrival of an enemy, possibly only a suspicious stranger. Once before, when camped out near a lonely 'soak' with Denzil Southwater, he had been warned by her long before the approach of a thievish aboriginal, and had therefore time for preparation, which enabled them to rout the 'Injun' with loss. Since then the character of Minniekins had stood deservedly high in the camp, where she took rank as a general favourite, to be petted, and bragged about by every man on the pay-sheet of the 'Last Chance Proprietary, Limited.'

Minniekins growled in a low, menacing manner. Then suddenly dashing forward, she

barked furiously, and rushed at a man who was advancing rapidly on the camp. A smothered oath, and a savage kick which sent the poor little thing yards away, with a broken leg, told of a frontal attack by the enemy. At the same moment, as it appeared, the man, and a dozen others, mysteriously emerging from the shadows at different points, made a rush for the room in which the gold-boxes had been stacked, firing their revolvers as they came on. The unarmed inmates of the camp—two shift bosses and Mr. Newstead, with three or four wages men—were taken completely by surprise.

Denzil Southwater was in his tent writing a home letter. For a moment it seemed, as the compact body of strangers moved up perilously near to the treasure-room, that the fort would be carried by assault.

But two of the garrison were neither unarmed nor unprepared: these were the man called 'Dick,' and old Jack. The latter was dressed for a walk to the township, a ceremonious visit which included a revolver in his hip-pocket loaded in every chamber. 'Nothin' like bein' "heeled," as we used ter say in the States,' he would answer to any remark made on this as a superfluous precaution. 'It's come in handy mor'n once or twice either, since then; yer never know what'll turn up on a goldfield.' His habit was justified on this occasion. The tall robber had fired point blank at Mr. Newstead, who, struck on the point of the shoulder, fell as if badly wounded, when Dick Andrews sprang

forward, firing two shots with lightning quickness.

The tall man dropped on his face, and lay still, while a shorter ruffian, apparently bent on reaching the camp, staggered wildly, then fell backwards, discharging his revolver in the act. A younger man had been badly hit by old Jack, while another had been captured by Denzil Southwater, who, dashing at him, unarmed, knocked up his revolver, and catching him a half-arm blow on the 'point,' held him, dazed, with a broken jaw, till the mine hands came up, and tied his hands behind him. The other men, seeing that the game was up, took to their heels, and lost themselves in the crowd which was pouring with increasing volume up the slopes of the Pilot Mount. The tableau was imposing—Minniekins on three legs, still barking furiously; the tall man, easily identified as 'Long Jack,' a criminal of many aliases, lying on his face, stone dead! while Mr. Southwater's prisoner, bound and blasphemous, stood in the centre of an excited crowd apparently anxious to lynch him then and there. However, Inspector Furnival, arriving with a strong body of police soon after, carried him off in the name of the Law, much to the disappointment of the public, who openly expressed their regret that Judge Lynch was not afforded an opportunity of proving the superiority of prompt trial and decisive action to the tardy verdict of an Assize Court. In the camp the casualties were: Arnold Banneret, bullet graze on temple; Newstead, wound in left shoulder;

Minniekins, broken fore-leg; while the man called 'Dick,' shot through the lungs, was in a serious, if not dangerous condition.

What a change from the gay hopes of the morning, when all had risen with the prospect of welcome travel—a respite from the monotonous toil of goldfield life; and, in the case of the escort party, returning to the luxuries of city life—to the society of friends and relatives, with the prestige of successful adventurers!

How narrowly, thought Arnold Banneret, had he himself escaped the fate of the robber, slain in his last fight against society; a shade nearer to the vital centre, and he would have lain ready for his coffin, even as the outcast criminal who, indeed, had paid the last penalty of a life of crime, in which even murder had been familiar. What a termination to the joyous imaginations with which he and his wife had regarded the speculation which promised so fairly! Fancy the headlines of the local papers:—

'The Last Chance Mine.'
Attempt to carry off the Escort Gold!
Five-and-twenty thousand ounces!
Desperate encounter. Two men killed:
Mr. Banneret and 'Long Jack.'
Several of the Escort wounded.
Immense excitement on the Field.

Special Evening Edition of
The *Clarion*.

Our Contemporary misinformed:
Mr. Banneret not killed.

He and Dick Andrews, the well-known Miner,
dangerously wounded—the latter, while
defending the Escort heroically, shot through
the body. 'The Gipsy' captured by the Honourable
Denzil Southwater, a Shareholder, who was unarmed.
Lord Newstead suffering from a broken arm.
Full particulars in our morning issue.

The effect of this and similar announcements may be imagined. Public feeling was stirred to its inmost depths. The police force, as usual, was denounced for incapacity and indolence, and the Government of the day arraigned for want of foresight, unreadiness, and general ignorance of its duties. As to the administration of law and order on this, the richest, the most extensive goldfield in Australia—the only parallel case commensurate with its abnormal inefficiency was that of the British War Office. But the West Australian Cabinet might yet earn the notoriety of having sacrificed a colony if this sort of thing was allowed to go on unchecked—and so on, and so on. The opposition journal of course discounted 'the habitual exaggeration of a contemporary, the editor of which could not allude to an attempt at the looting of a rich treasure-cargo—an attempt which had signally failed, moreover—without dragging in absurd parallels equally out of date and out of reason. Omniscient as he claimed to be, he had not become acquainted with the fact, now for the first time divulged to their reporter, a gentleman of wide experience in Australian and American mines, that "Dick Andrews," a working miner, and shareholder in

the Reward Claim, who shot dead the well-known desperado "Long Jack" and wounded "The Nugget"—formerly of Port Arthur—was no other than the notorious Richard Lawless, the brother of Ned and Kate, concerned in the killing of Inspector Francis Dayrell, in pursuance of a vendetta cherished for years by the Lawless family. They eventually accomplished his death. Lured into an ambush, thus fell one of the most daring and energetic officers of the Police Force of Victoria. They had evaded the warrants issued for their apprehension, disappearing in the "Never-Never" regions of Queensland, chiefly populated, if all tales be true, by refugees of their class and character. From this "land of lost souls" Kate Lawless returned to die by her own hand on the grave of her child at Running Creek on Monaro; while her brother Richard, a marvellous bushman and all-round worker, as are many of his compatriots, has been employed under the very noses of the police as "Dick Andrews," remarkable only for his steady, hardworking habits and inoffensive general demeanour. Tall, spare, and sinewy, wearing the ordinary beard of the dweller in the Waste, he was in no way distinguishable from the thousands of Australians whom the magnet of the "Golden Belt" has drawn with resistless force to our colony. There is no intention, we hear, of putting the law in force against him; for he will be arraigned before a Higher Court, a more august Judge, than Australia can furnish. His wounds are mortal. His hours are numbered. And before to-morrow's sun leaves Pilot Mount in

darkness, the soul of the erring, but not wholly lost homicide, whom men knew as Dick Lawless, will have quitted its earthly tenement for the final audit.'

The editorial dictum was prophetic. Mr. Banneret and Denzil Southwater, watching by the dying man's couch, listened to his last words while the labouring breath grew faint—then failed for ever. One bullet had pierced his left lung; another had lodged in the spine. Both injuries were mortal. It was a question of hours—of few of them indeed.

'I stopped "Long Jack," Commissioner!' he said, while a slow smile of satisfaction lit up the calm features, 'afore he got in another pot at you. He'd not have missed twice. I'm goin' out, and except for the wife and kids I don't know as it's much odds; there's enough to keep them when she gets back to Tumut, where her people live. Land's easy got there; a bit of corn-flat with a few cows 'll keep her easy and comfortable. The boy and girl 'll get schoolin' till they're out in the world, and their mother won't tell 'em too much about me—their poor father, as died in his right place—a-standin' off them as tried to collar the gold he'd worked hard for. You write it out, Mr. Southwater—all as I've said, and just put Richard Lawless his mark at the foot. The Commissioner might witness it—if he'll be so good—and you too, sir.'

They complied with the sufferer's request. Great drops of blood welled up from the shattered lung, as between gasps he laboriously formed the

cross which validated his will, made for the benefit of the woman who had followed him from the green, fertile valley, where the sparkling river comes leaping down from the snow-crowned alp. With her he had been ever mild and patient—a tireless worker when work was to be had—often away for months at a time, but reserved as to his occupation. Brokenly, and with hesitation, he said: 'Commissioner! I'll die easier like if you'll shake hands afore I go. It's a suspension o' labour in a manner of speakin'.' And with a quiet smile on his lips at an old goldfields jest, the soul of 'Dick Andrews,' otherwise Richard Lawless, fled away from its earthly tenement, leaving the hand of Arnold Banneret, ex-Commissioner of Barrawong, New South Wales, still enclosed in a dead man's rigid grasp.

'Poor Dick! poor chap!' said Banneret; 'there goes a man's life made for better things. I suppose he *did* save mine—barring accident. That long ruffian wouldn't have missed twice. With the exception of the vendetta business with Dayrell—and there are two versions of that story—I never heard of his doing anything mean or dishonest—that is "crooked"'—he added reflectively—having regard to the prevailing tone of Monaro morality.

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The fervour of the editors of all the journals, printed within a thousand miles or so, having exhausted itself and the public interest, matters returned to their normal state and condition. The escort waggonette, artistically tooled by Gore

Chesterfield, cleared out for Perth at sunrise one fine morning, 'laden' (as the local mining organ put it) 'with gold, ammunition, firearms, and decayed gentlefolk.' On the box-seat, between Mr. Banneret and the charioteer, sat an aristocratic society dame of ducal connections, who, originally voyaging to Fremantle with maternal solicitude, had remained to take a hand in the mining adventure of the period. Having been down the deepest mine of the 'field,' and across the desert on a camel as far as the famous 'Leonora' and 'Mount Idalia,' in both of which 'shows' she had invested sensationally, she was not to be daunted by the off-chance of a bullet wound on the present journey. The perils of this passage through the wilderness were, however, minimised by the attendance of a doubled police escort and half a hundred volunteer guards, who (shares in the popular investment of the day, the 'Rotherwood' mine, being at a premium and rising fast) resolved to combine the performance of a patriotic duty with the excitement of a 'jamberoo' in Perth, and 'a whiff of the briny' long looked forward to, and, before this happy conjunction of profit and pleasure, almost despaired of. When it is considered that most of the men who composed this advanced guard were young, or youthful-seeming—that the prospects of the majority were like the climate, sunny in the extreme — that fortune had lately showered favours upon nearly all,—it may be imagined what a joyous cavalcade, dashing at reckless speed through plain and thicket —waking the long-silent, solitary champaign with

song and shout—the 'Last Chance' escort must have appeared to the ordinary wayfarer.

O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

The treasure was duly deposited in the banks of the period; certain favourites of fortune, among them the lady of the box-seat, took passage by the outgoing mail-steamer. Lord Newstead was bound for 'England, home, and beauty,' whence his return was problematical; Arnold Banneret for Sydney; while Messrs. Chesterfield and Southwater would return to the vicinity of Pilot Mount, not having as yet acquired the 'pile' which was to crown the pyramid of a life's endeavour. Arnold Banneret made a final adieu to the 'Reward Claim,' having by wire received a declaration from his wife that, 'no matter how many ounces to the ton the "Last Chance" produced, never again would she consent to his putting foot on that goldfield; even if his presence was indispensable to prevent Pilot Mount from being turned into a volcano in full working order, her resolve remained unalterable. What she had suffered when she heard the news (false as it turned out to be) of his death, could never be endured twice. So now, he knew.' When Mrs. Banneret concluded an argument with these words the 'incident was closed.' Her sympathetic partner 'for better for worse' resigned himself to a future existence hampered only by the necessity of finding use for a capital of a hundred thousand pounds or two, 'with all the woes it brings.'

He promised himself the satisfaction, however,

of revisiting Tumut, and personally assuring the future of Mrs. Richard Lawless and her children, which, as he had always loved and admired the place and people, he regarded as a sacred duty, and a delightful holiday not to be neglected. Thus, filled with anticipations of home-returning joys, as he trod once more the deck of the P. & O. liner *Baghdad*, marked once more the Oriental garb, and heard the familiar-sounding voices of the Lascar crew, his heart swelled within him, as in 'the dear, dead days beyond recall.'

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The return voyage in the *Baghdad* was pure unmixed delight. Very rarely is it otherwise in the 'floating clubs' of the P. & O. 'The liner she's a lady,' in every sense of the word. In the eyes of the outward-bound passengers for England Arnold Banneret and Lord Newstead were heroes and 'conquistadores,' rivalling the comrades of Pizarro returning from Peru laden with the treasure of the Incas. Lord Newstead secured the larger share of admiration—young and handsome, heir to an historic name, wounded in the fight, what modern gallant could hope to rival him in the good graces of the lady passengers? His right arm still supported by a sling, and his disabled condition, called forth many proffers of active sympathy.

Mr. Banneret, on account of his age and patriarchal rank, was not so much an object of interest and admiration; nevertheless, the 'scar on his brown cheek revealed' if not 'a token true of Bosworth Field,' a genuine record of a 'close call,'

as an American 'shift boss,' travelling east from 'Great Holder,' entitled the incident.

Their gold, now safe under hatches, was variously estimated at from fifty to a hundred thousand ounces, according to the experience or imagination of the narrator. The winds and waves were kind; the Great Bight was so smooth that 'you'd hardly know it,' as a fair voyager of experience in the South Pacific characterised it. And shortly after the dawnlight—clearer grown, and faintly roseate-hued—opened to view the sandstone portals of the harbour lake of the South, the *Baghdad's* passengers, in cabs, carriages, trams, and omnibuses, distributed themselves throughout the Sydney clubs and hotels, with an economy of time and trouble unattainable in any but the mother State.

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Home again! Everything had gone well in his absence. For the twentieth time Arnold Banneret vowed that never again would he leave the domestic Eden for the outer world, how fair soever might be the lure held out by inconstant fortune. The girls were growing up; his boys, like every other man's boys, needed the occasional parental warning—the guiding hand. His wife's cheek paled as she traced the still visible track of the robber's bullet. 'What was sufficient repayment, what compensation adequate, for such risks? And if——' but she would not suffer him to proceed with the conjectures of what *might* have happened. The 'if' had remained undeveloped, so there was no use speculating on grisly possibilities.

Sydney was more beauteous than ever, with glorious gardens, and the daily ocean breeze. Say that the noonday heat was at times oppressive, what was it in comparison with the terrible sun-rays of the West—a tent only between the dweller therein and the cloudless, relentless sky? The glorious semi-tropical foliage of the sea-girt city, the lawns so freshly verdurous, the stately pines, the flowering shrubs, the rose thickets, the carefully tended, if somewhat narrow roads, which, winding around the harbour cliffs, open out such enchanting views of sea and shore, earth and sky—specially arranged for the delectation of strangers and pilgrims! The swift-winged yachts and pleasure-boats still floated like sea-gulls above the translucent wave. All these delights and refreshments smote the senses of the home-returning wayfarer almost as freshly as if tasted for the first time.

Then the delicious awakening in the fair, sweet dawn of the early summer, with the certainty that there was now no need for doubt or anxiety touching the family fortunes. A competence, nay, more than a sufficiency for all their needs, was assured. Their luck had turned. No more was it necessary to go stolidly on with the daily work which gained the daily bread. There was not, could not be again, the necessity for calculation as to what liability required to be arranged for—what pressing account to be paid in full, or if not, compromised by payment on account. Such things had been in the past—in that shadowy region now so dim and distant-seeming. No, thank God! and a wave of gratitude passed through his every sense and faculty

as he realised that those days and their accompanying sacrifices had passed away for ever. Were they happier now? In his musings by the seashore, at eve or moonrise, he sometimes asked himself the question. The reply was not always in the affirmative. They had been happy—truly, consciously happy, then. If there were difficulties, they had overcome them. If there had been debts and doubts, anxiety never far distant, succour unexpected had come in time of need. The responsibilities of official position had been great—at times almost overpowering, but their very magnitude had stimulated his energies—he had never faltered; strong in the resolve to deal justly, impartially, with the high questions committed to his judgment, he had fought through opposition, misrepresentation, and discouragement, to emerge at last, with the approval of his conscience and the confidence of the heterogeneous workers whom he had ruled for a quarter of a century.

And now, having passed through the *Sturm und Drang* of early manhood, he had reached a period of life when youth had flown—when strength and activity could no longer be looked for—when whatever changes took place must necessarily be, in some respects, for the worse. What would the future be? In what direction would the rising generation of the family, nay, of Australia, be impelled?

CHAPTER VII

WHAT would be the character, the fate of this infant British nation, so strangely inaugurated, so wondrously, providentially, even, cast forth upon the shore of an almost unknown continent?

The exiles came to strive with hostile natives and an unfamiliar climate. They found, day by day, birds and beasts, plants and seasons, alike foreign to all previous experience. Yet, so far, how amazingly has prospered the daring experiment in colonisation!

This founding of empires was undertaken with the splendid British contempt for obstacles and dangers, which, if often giving encouragement to apparently imprudent enterprises, has always ennobled the race. Not only was it such, but initiated almost in the throes of a conflict which imperilled Britain's national existence, — a war, under the ablest generals, directed by the subtlest organising intellect in the then known world, aiming not so much at European conquest as the subjugation of the Mistress of the Seas!

But the haughty Spaniard — in the sixteenth century — who had planned to humble, to discrown,

was doomed, like the world-absorbing Corsican, to ruin and defeat—his 'invincible Armada,' tempest-driven on the rocks of a hostile coast, his grandest towering 'tall Amiral,' shot-shattered, burned, sunk, and destroyed by the unconquered naval heroes of 'the spacious times of Great Elizabeth.' What men the times bred!—captains by land and sea: soldiers, whether privates or officers, who, trained to obey to the death, stood unflinching or advanced resistless; sailors who walked above the blood-stained decks, cool as on a carpet, or swarmed over the enemy's battleship to the maddening sound of 'Boarders away,' where every third man fell dead or wounded.

Have we such sailors, such soldiers still?

Yes! a thousand times, yes! and from this very land of the distant South. Was it not abundantly proved in the South African War, when the half-disciplined or wholly untrained colonial troops, whether Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, or Tasmanians, excited the wonder and admiration of all competent critics?—their initiative, their endurance, their intelligence proved on many a hard-fought field; not less also the stubborn valour which gloried in scorning to surrender, while the last man and the last horse lay dying, side by side!

From the weird, carelessly culled British crowd, flung as exiles on the shores of the far unknown South land, labourers and lawgivers, criminals and clerks—what a people has been evolved! The Briton has justified his constant boast, that, given the nucleus of a British community, with free soil,

free law, and his inherent right to appeal to it for relief against wrong and injustice, the community will develop the race-characteristics of the ancestral isle. From the oppressed band of Puritans, content to face the rock-bound coast, the storm-tossed ocean, the crafty, ruthless savage, if only they might enjoy religious freedom—from the men and women of their own creed and colour, crowded in unwholesome vessels—sold, yes, sold into slavery on arrival—from every kind of absconder and Adullamite, a newer, greater Britain confronts the world: in arms, a fearless rival; in peace or war, the strongest, the best educated, the most successful nation, this day, beneath the sun. Leavened by the virtue, the intellect, the heroism of the Pilgrim Band, the colossal American republic stands to-day, ready to face the universe in honourable contest: in contest for commercial success—for the triumphs of Art—for intellectual pre-eminence—for scientific progress.

What other human hive throws off such swarms as Britain the Unconquered—collectors from generation to generation of all things rich and precious in the eyes of men? Strong to defend also the treasure-cells; to punish, with fierce and deadly sting, the spoiler and the freebooter,—in material success rivalling, if not surpassing, the ancestral Briton.

The vast, impressive Dominion of Canada, about to take rank as the world's granary, has shown her devoted loyalty to the British Empire in the recent war, and but for the mistaken policy

of the British Government—in the days of Lord North—the Great Republic of the United States might have been as firmly joined to the Mother Isle as the daughter States of Australia and New Zealand — forming a colossal bulwark against anarchy, socialism, and unnecessary interference with the world's peace. That the rupture between Britain and her greatest oversea possession was suffered to take place, owing to the obstinacy of a mistaken King and a feeble Cabinet, was deplored by contemporary intellects of distinction. It has been even more deeply regretted by all thoughtful Britons, whether colonists or home-born, even unto this present day.

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On a certain Saturday morning the mail steamer arrived from the east, bearing such passengers for Fremantle and Perth as desired to behold the world-famed goldfields of which they had heard so much.

Newspapers from Europe and America were then attainable. What long, luxurious Sunday morning lounges for the happy possessors of the latest news did these precious 'home papers' and letters represent! The younger son, roughly garbed, toil-worn, it may well be ragged even, smiled in his abundant beard as the post-mark of the village near the ancestral hall met his eager eyes. What tidings would the closely guarded sheets furnish? The death of the ailing sister—of the fond mother, the aged father, to whom he had vowed, with the careless confidence of youth, to return laden with gold, or bearing in other

form the imprint of success and distinction. How he rejoiced audibly to find that all was well! The Squire, hearty and hale, as of old—looking forward to the hunting season, or the annual 'shoot' over his preserves, with unabated confidence; the younger brother had taken his degree at Oxford, or Cambridge, and was safe for a curacy—there was a living in the family.

'Thank God! Nothing wrong this time. Perhaps this time next year I may see my way.' Then comes the sigh of hope deferred. Besides newspapers came people. Not so many as in the earlier days of the rich yields and the big 'rushes.' Mining, of course, not so sensational. Up-to-date appliances, improved machinery, with a steadier monthly output, and so on.

A close watch was, however, kept on the passenger list, as there was no knowing who might not turn up, or from whence. The men working now in the big mines as metallurgists, 'shift bosses,' or mine managers, chiefly well-born, often highly cultured and gently nurtured, had travelled far amid the older lands and cities,—historically famous,—as well as amid these newly found desert wastes: this arid, solitary, trackless wilderness so recently exploited by civilised man, with his absorbing needs. When, therefore, Gore Chesterfield threw down the paper containing the passenger list of the P. & O. liner *Aden*, with an exclamation denoting surprise and satisfaction, the deduction was easy that a comrade of earlier years had arrived, with whom it would be a relief and a luxury to exchange confidences. 'By Jove!'

he exclaimed, 'this is a rum start!—who would ever have thought of Lytton Carteret of Guy's, of all people in the world, turning up here? Why, he was with me in that expedition of Herman Paul's on the pre-Phœnician 'placers,' worrying through the ruins left by these rum chaps. Did they find gold? Yes, and plenty of it, judging by what we saw. But they went about it in a scientific manner—not like our burrowings and scratchings, living under canvas, and roasting our souls and bodies under canvas—like lunatics, as Eastern people consider all Englishmen to be.'

'Well, what did they do that gave them such a "break" over us?' inquired his Australian-born mate, belonging to a pioneer family founded by a retired military officer who had fought under Wellington through the long blood-stained Peninsular War from Ciudad Rodrigo to Waterloo, and who had turned his sword into a ploughshare after marrying one of the daughters of the land.

'Do? What we don't seem to manage so well in these latter days of civilisation about which we brag so unnecessarily. Built walled cities, or something near akin; put pressure on the Kaffirs and Zulus, tribesmen of the day (of course not these very fellows); but they made them work, whoever they were. First of all, built stone forts, inside which they could defy the heathen artillery of the period, cross-bows and arrows, with lances, maces, javelins, and so forth, for close fighting. They had pots and crucibles, smelted ore, and the rest of it. Oh! they were pretty well up to date, I can tell you.'

'Sounds well,' said his comrade, who was scientific as well as practical—had taken two firsts, and two second scholarships at an Australian University for Civil Engineering. 'Why did you and he come away from such a jolly interesting place?'

'H—m! the death-rate was high, water bad, climate awful, steamy and airless; besides, to tell the truth, I suspected the working director of looking upon us much as Bismarck did the rank and file of the Prussian army — not perhaps exactly as "Kanonenfutter," but to be expended ("gastados," as the Spanish idiom is) primarily in the cause of science, chiefly for the glorification and renown of Sigismund Paulsen, botanist, member of the Society of Explorers, etc. etc.; you can't beat a German leader for that. He is everything and everybody; the rest are nothing and nobody. So Carteret and I cleared.'

'Where did he go?'

'Restless and dissatisfied as usual — capital operations not sufficiently numerous to compensate for loss of time—thought he'd try the South Sea Islands.'

'Any gold there?'

'None so far; but human life little regarded—obscure diseases, and a possible discovery, his absorbing life-long quest for a cure of *the* most terrible, insidious, so-called incurable disease, Leprosy!'

'Horrible to think of! Why did he pick the most hopeless evil in the whole world—the most loathsome?'

'Just because it *was* so. He had lost a friend

by it, or rather, he had seen him deported to Molokai, the leper island, where Father Damien lived and died—himself a martyr-victim. The South Sea law is, that when the incipient symptom shows itself—the white circular mark never known to indicate falsely—the patient is carried off, and landed on the Island of the Lost, whence he or she can never return to civilisation.'

'And do you mean to tell me that a man's wife, or his child, can be legally torn from him and cast into hell—as such an accursed spot must be—compelled to live out the remainder of life there? What a fate—what a mockery of civilisation!'

'This law, like others, was made for the preservation of society in the mass; better that the few should suffer than that the many be infected. So Carteret was compelled to see his friend torn from his wife, to witness his despair. They had only been married a few months. None knew, of course, how the infection was taken, nor did it matter. He was landed on that awful strand—is there now—where at a certain time in the evening the cries and groans of the patients in the more advanced stages can be plainly heard. Carteret is hardly sane on the subject, and from that hour resolved to devote his life to the discovery of a cure. To this end he made an exhaustive study of the disease in all its manifestations and stages of development. Worn with study, lowered in health and spirits, he turned to the as yet practically untrodden fields of research in the east of Asia, resolved to test the boundless, half-mythical

solitudes on the northern frontier of India. These he traversed, cheerfully risking health, freedom, life itself, if but the end could be obtained—the salvation of his friend, the happiness of Lilburne's peerless wife. She was his cousin, and they had been boy and girl lovers.'

'And has no cure ever been found for the disease?' asked Leslie Bournefield. 'So many physical evils have been attacked successfully of late years—X-rays, and what's that other boon to mankind—Radium?'

'Reports of cures, of course, but rarely authenticated,' replied Chesterfield. 'One feels doubtful, but nothing will discourage Carteret. He will go on searching till he dies, or Mrs. Lilburne does. Then, unless he elects to serve humanity in general for her sake—"in memoriam"—I fear his interest in the question will cease. His last remaining hope was in a nostrum said to be the property of the monks of Vatopede.'

'Where in the world is that?'

'It is the largest of the monasteries of Mount Athos, in the Levant. The richest, too, they say—built by the Emperor Constantine the Great. That worthy monarch, like Naaman the Syrian, was afflicted with leprosy. He thereupon ordered a number of children to be killed, a bath of innocent blood being the favourite remedy of the day! While they were selecting them, it was revealed to him in a vision that if he became a baptized Christian the leprosy would depart from him. He did so; he was immediately restored to health, and the children were set free. The legend is

related by Moses Chorensis, whose veracity is undoubted. One miraculous cure having occurred in their monastery, the good monks were not minded to let the fame thereof die out.'

'What did they do to that end?'

'It must be remembered that all monasteries of importance numbered among the brethren some who specially devoted themselves to the study and practice of medicine. To heal the sick was a part, an important part of the charity to which all members of monastic orders were vowed. As in the case of the nuns of certain convents, these institutions held specifics warranted to alleviate the more virulent diseases. Pilgrims from all parts of the civilised world resorted to the more famous monasteries. Many reached their homes professing to be cured. If not wholly restored to health, the undoubting religious faith of the mediæval period completed the process. Even in this age of analysis and positivism, do not the professors of the Christian Science cult work nearly on similar lines? And what quasi-miracles do they not allege? It must be remembered also that the monastic student, undisturbed by the distractions of a later age, safe within the massive convent walls, had enviable opportunities for perfecting his empirical remedies. Small wonder, then, that in course of time the priceless potion distilled from herbs grown only in the garden of Vatopede, mysteriously connected with the cure of Constantine the Great, came to be accepted as the sovereign remedy for the disease, alike terrible and insidious, which, since the dawn of history, had smitten with fatal power the

peasant in his cabin, the noble in his castle, the king upon his throne.'

'All this is very instructive, of course,' said Bournefield, 'but I can't say I've taken much interest in the medical aspect of this curse of mankind; without meaning to be frivolous, I always thought it principally concerned the people of old Biblical times, and that it was practically unknown in these modern days.'

'But you've heard of the Little Bay Leper Hospital in Sydney?'

'I've seen reference from time to time in the papers. Half-a-dozen Chinamen there, are there not?'

'Double the number, at least. But would you be surprised to hear that within the last few years two European ladies—rich, cultured, travelled, possessed of everything necessary for comfort and happiness—had been confined there?'

'Surely not! Impossible! Is your information trustworthy?'

'I was told of it by a Government official—an old family friend, a man of the highest reputation for truth and probity, with access to all such institutions by right of position.'

'I suppose he told you more. How, in Heaven's name, did it come to pass?'

'It seems that these ladies were, in a literary sense, exploiting the South Sea Islands world, with which earthly paradise, as it appeared to them, they were charmed—one may even say intoxicated, as were many before them. The younger one (they were aunt and niece) took photographs

and kept a diary—she purposed to write a book when they reached "home." Poor girl! how little she thought where that home was to be!'

'And so?'

'Yes, indeed!—gruesome, mysterious, hardly credible; but true, or it would not be life. They left Honolulu for Sydney in the San Francisco boat after touching at Ponapé. For a week all went well. Then they kept their cabins. The stewardess, the doctor, when appealed to, would say nothing beyond that the lady passengers were ill—very ill; fever perhaps; people often got it in these latitudes. But by and by dark rumours began to emanate from the forecastle—the crew knew what sort of *fever* was occasionally spoken of with bated breath by island passengers. Captain and mate knew *nothing*—bluffed off all inquiry. But the Health Officer came on board directly the Heads were passed. It was early morning. The doctor was interviewed, and a very strict examination made of passengers and crew. After which the two lady passengers, muffled up to the eyes, were carried off in the doctor's own boat. They were transferred without loss of time to the Little Bay Hospital. *Leprosy*, of course! Poor things! it was never known how they contracted it, but the fact was indisputable.'

'Was it known before they came on board?'

'Not suspected for an instant. But within a week after leaving they began (the stewardess said) to suffer from great depression and strange, unaccountable sensations. Dull pains, accompanied by semi-delirious conditions, supervened, gradually

becoming more acute and distressing. The doctor prescribed medicines which gave temporary relief, but did not explain his suspicions, and advised confinement to their cabins; occasionally, as the boat neared Sydney, sobs and wailing cries were heard by the attendants. As little as possible was said, and the facts of the case did not find their way into the papers.'

'I never heard of anything so dreadful in my life,' said the listener; 'I feel like a man in a dream. But what became of them?'

'The elder lady died, mercifully, within the year, after which the younger became insane, and was taken to an asylum, where she may be lingering yet for all I know. Better dead, perhaps.'

'Of course the seizures are one in a thousand compared with the ratio of people killed by typhoid fever or smallpox—but what an awful possibility! One shudders at the thought not only of pain unceasing—almost unendurable, but of becoming loathsome to one's fellow-creatures, even to one's nearest and dearest. Why such a sacrifice of all things held dear to humanity should be permitted, shakes one's belief in the Divine interposition in mundane affairs.'

'Which leads into the domain of the unknowable, where the paths are dubious. Thank Heaven at least for the power of action! *That* at least is left to us. "So to bed," as the late Mr. Pepys hath it.'

Carteret left for the coast on the following day. His next letter was from Honolulu, whence he had formulated a plan, and taken the first steps towards

the fulfilment of a long-devised scheme of relief. The 'hour had come,' he wrote, and, what was of more importance, 'the man.'

Plentiful, and easy to be secured for adequate pay, as were the sailors of fortune on or around the beaches of Ponapé and Ocean Island, there were difficulties in the way.

They were bold sea-rovers, brave to recklessness, seasoned to all manner of tragedies—mutinies, wrecks, 'cuttings out' by savage islanders, what not. But they were short of the wherewithal with which to begin a campaign. They had neither cash nor credit,—proverbially without the first requisite, while the second indispensable was absolutely nil.

Throughout the wide ocean world of the South Pacific there was, however, one master mariner, owning the far-famed brig *Leonora*, and a name to conjure with from New Zealand to the Line Islands. This was the celebrated, perhaps more correctly termed notorious, William Henry Hayston, the dreaded captain of the *Leonora*—the smartest vessel of that strange fleet which the South Sea traffic bred and maintained. Half-traders, half-slavers, or wholly privateers, on occasion equally ready to play either part at a pinch, and wholly indifferent to flag, or maritime law, if the pay or prize-money were but adequate to the risk. It was freely asserted that there was *no adventure* which this 'pirate king'—so to speak—would not undertake on adequate remuneration. Lawless, dangerous, even desperate he might be, but he had rarely been known to fail

when perfect seamanship, dauntless courage, and contempt of all ordinary, even extraordinary, risks were indispensable. And whatever contract he elected to accept, he always commanded a crew fully prepared to stand by him to the death.

Captain William Henry Hayston, formerly of the United States Navy, but now unattached, owner and commander of the brig *Leonora*, may have had misunderstandings, more or less serious, with Her Britannic Majesty's and other Governments in an earlier day, but if so, no one apparently cared to remind him of such trifles. As he walked up the principal thoroughfare with his supercargo, and first mate, a half-caste, well known (and feared also) throughout the island world, he did not give people the idea of a man to be lightly interfered with. Not that there was anything suggestive of unlawful callings or piratical ferocity about his manner or appearance. Perfectly dressed and appointed after the naval fashion of the day, his air was serene, his accent affable and courteous. Friends and acquaintances, official and otherwise, were greeted with the free speech and ready smile which had served him so well in many a close encounter with the myrmidons of the law.

Marching up to the Consulate of France, he presented himself to that dread official, and transacted a short interview with easy assurance and consummate policy; sympathised with the official view of some later native troubles; and after mentioning Callao as the port he thought would be probably his destination, gracefully made adieu, leaving his interlocutor utterly in the

dark as to his movements, his business, or his intentions.

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With a well-found steamer, hope in his heart, and joy irradiating his every sense, Carteret on board the *Morana* is now nearing Honolulu—which, if the breeze holds fair, will be reached to-morrow night. Here he is to meet Captain Hayston, of the *Leonora*, with whom he has already arranged terms and conditions, and who has signified his willingness to land a crew at Molokai, prepared to carry off the arch-fiend himself, or the Governor of the Straits Settlements, always provided that the sum mentioned between them should be 'planked down,' and that the cost of any prosecution on behalf of the Crown be repaid within a specified time.

An unobtrusive entrance by the *Leonora* had been made late at night, and in the morning it was announced that Captain Hayston had once more honoured their waters with his presence. The famous schooner had slipped in and taken up her anchorage without aid from pilot or other functionary, but she was no sooner discovered at dawnlight, placidly reposing like a strange waterfowl in a pond among the ducks and geese of a farmyard, amid the ships of all nations, than a distinct feeling of unrest, not unaccompanied by apprehension, began to manifest itself.

'Some darned villainy afloat, I guess,' said a grizzled American whaleman, 'when William H. Hayston, master mariner, drops his anchor. Sometimes it's contraband o' war—blackbirdin'—

or smuggled opium—but thar was always some game on hand afore he quit—which he did sudden-like.'

'Why, I thought they couldn't bring anything agen him now?' said one of the *habitués* of the bar and beach—'anyhow he spends his money free and pleasant—nothin' mean 'bout *that*!'

'Maybe yes! maybe no!' quoth the man from 'Martha's Vineyard.' 'Anyhow, folks had better keep their eyes skinned, I reckon, as hev' anythin' to lose, if it's only an extry wife. He's tarnation deep, and so all-fired lucky, that old Nick himself'll hev' to mind his eye when he passes in his checks.'

'Pleased to meet you again, Captain Hayston,' said Carteret. 'I thought you were likely to be punctual when a business appointment like mine was on the cards. My name is Lytton Carteret.'

'Sir, I duly received your letter with accompanying directions—trust we shall do business in terms of your offer'; and here the light glowed in his blue eyes like the sparkle in a fire opal.

'Much obliged, Captain! We have met before. I saw you in the Bay of Islands in 18—. You were there when the crew of the *Jonathan Stubbs* mutinied, and threw the captain overboard.'

'That is so, and we helped to arrest the darned villains, and send them to Sydney for trial, where they were hanged in due form.'

'Captain Hayston,' said Carteret, 'suppose we get to business. I've heard many things about

you, but I'm aware that you're a man of your word.' Hayston nodded. 'I place the fullest confidence in your discretion. The affair, which I depend on your help to carry out, is, I am aware, of delicate, not to say dangerous nature. I wish to get away a friend of mine who is detained at Molokai.'

'It's against island law—means fine and imprisonment on conviction. The damned place is closely watched. But it means yanking a soul out of hell, and I'll risk it, if we agree.'

'And now, as to the terms?'

'I must have a thousand pounds. Five hundred down, and the balance when I land your friend at Norfolk Island. He can get a ship to any port in Australia after that.'

'Agreed! You shall have a draft on my Sydney agents, Towns and Co., to-night; I can find an endorser here, before we leave, for the second payment, which I shall have great pleasure in making.'

'That's the way I like to do business,' said Hayston, 'but if you'll give me the pleasure of your company to dinner this evening, on board the *Leonora*, we can talk everything fully over, and fix up the best way to carry this matter out.'

'The arrangement will suit me very well. We shall be quite private, I know; and there is much to be said and settled before the start.'

After making the round of the chief places of business in the town, and posting letters of more or less importance, Carteret walked down to the beach with Hayston, and was pulled out to the

Leonora, graceful craft that she was! They were received at the gangway in true man-o'-war fashion, and as the Captain glanced round, with the quick, trained eye of the seaman born to command, Carteret noted that every man was at his place, and the vessel, generally, in exquisite order. The crew, with few exceptions, were islanders, some were half-castes, a few negroes, but all a muscular, daring, resolute lot— the discipline had evidently been strict and unrelaxing.

Going below, the stewards—one a light mulatto, the other a Japanese dressed in his native costume—were apparently just preparing to bring in the dinner. Carteret and the Captain entered a smaller cabin, under a heavy gold-embroidered curtain. This cabin was used as a smoke-room and private audience-chamber. The ornaments and curios suggested many climes and not less desperate adventures. Pistols with silver hilts—Malay krises —swords and daggers—evil-looking spears—South Sea dresses were in evidence, in number almost sufficient to cover the sides of the cabin.

'I suppose,' said Carteret, 'there are stories about some of these weapons, Captain Hayston?'

'Well! Yes! indeed — about nearly all of them,' replied Hayston. 'That krise was nearly making an end of me. I was looking at another man, when the devil of a Malay got close up in the *mêlée*—it was a pirate junk affair—I was in the Navy of the United States then—(here he sighed). The Malay had just killed a midshipman, poor boy! and was fighting like ten devils, as all Malays do

when they're "amok," when a quartermaster cut him down, and the krise grazed my side.

'That old silver casket with two handles was full of Spanish doubloons when I first came across it. It belonged to the captain of a slaver—a fellow that had eluded us and the smartest frigates of the British Navy. I was a youngster at the time, and thought the affair great fun. The slaver captain was a Spaniard, accused of enormous cruelties—throwing sick men overboard and all kinds of devilry. We found prisoners chained in the hold, officers and passengers from a merchant ship.'

CHAPTER VIII

'THEIR last prize,' continued Hayston, 'was a dreadful sight! Pah! I can hardly bear to think of it now.' As he spoke, his face darkened, and a look of rage, concentrated, lurid, pitiless, passed over his features, transforming their whole expression into that of a demon—an avenging Azrael; his whole countenance suddenly passed from a state of smiling, even fascinating courtesy, to that of murderous wrath—deadly, implacable, consuming.

'They paid the penalty?' said Carteret.

'Yes! They were triced up to the yard-arm —two and two—a trial was dispensed with—Uncle Sam having passed a special ordinance with regard to such cases. The sharks had gathered around after the first corpses were dropped. It was a calm: they were torn in pieces almost as soon as the breath was out of their bodies. That the sea which had been crimsoned many a time with the blood of their innocent victims, should now be stained with their own, was only just retribution. Too merciful, of course; but we can't go back to the methods of the Middle Ages

—more's the pity! And now let us change the subject. "Land ho!" as an old captain of mine in the West Indies used to say when he heard the dinner bell.'

The melodious sound of a silver temple-gong announced the service of a meal as perfect in its way as anything arranged on salt water can be.

The wines, of the choicest French and Spanish vintages, were such as few 'Amphitryons où l'on dîne' have the privilege of presenting to a guest. The turtle soup would have tempted an alderman to change his religion. But once previously had Carteret tasted such Madeira as followed it. The fish, the prawn curry, the beautiful crested pigeons of the islands, guinea-fowls in size, pheasants in delicacy of flavour—without pursuing the detail, it may be assumed from Carteret's testimony, then and afterwards, that a jury of *gourmets* would have been hard set to decide in favour of any naval competing function of the day. The dry champagne which followed the hock was of a known, accredited *crû*, but did not tempt Carteret to do more than reasonable justice to it. He had no intention of measuring strength of brain against his entertainer; more particularly with a vitally important stake on the cards. At a comparatively early hour he discussed with Hayston the more binding terms of the agreement, and argued them out, clause by clause, before they parted for the night. Not wholly satisfied with the propriety of concluding the affair after dinner, moderate as had been his potations, Carteret deferred the signing and sealing of the final instrument till

noon on the following day. Which was at once agreed to.

Captain Hayston, indeed, expressed his intention of sailing for foreign parts on the morrow. Thus, if all preliminaries were completed at midday, he would be free to lift anchor, and taking advantage of the breeze off the land would initiate action. Doubtless he had intelligence agents on whom he could rely—agents 'steady of heart, and stout of hand' as ever served king or minister, and who dared not play him false. When, therefore, the *Leonora* shook out her topsails and stood off the land, a point or two to the south of west, shaping a course for the crimson afterglow of the fading sunset, there were ten thousand of Carteret's dollars in the double-handled casket of the slaver Leon Gonzales, late master of the *Pedro Torero*—also in the private escritoire an order for five hundred pounds, payable on demand by the firm of Robert Towns and Co., Fort Street, Sydney, endorsed by Oppenheimer Brothers, of Suva, Fiji.

If the course was altered at midnight, and shaped to one which would bring them close to Molokai, where the eventful dash and relief expedition would be carried out, who was to be the wiser?

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The night, for which they had watched for nearly a week, was almost a calm — but overclouded, and dark as a wolf's throat. The proverbial hand, when held before the face, was invisible.

The *Leonora*, miles away at nightfall, had glided closer to the land and lay off and on. The dropping of an anchor near the forbidden shore would, of course, have aroused suspicion. The crew, with Bill Hicks at the steer oar, had been carefully chosen. The whale-boat, which, for reasons of his own, the Captain of the *Leonora* always had on board, was reliable on any sea, and against any of the winds of heaven. The crew was composed of Rotumah islanders, perhaps the best men—except those of Norfolk Island—in rough water or wild gale that the South Pacific breeds. They may have had a general idea of the nature of the service in which they were engaged, but were merely told that they were to pull quietly to the beach near a rocky point, where a post stood in the sand, with a small lantern attached to it. There they would see a man, wrapped in a cloak. As soon as the boat grounded, he would walk towards them. They were to run to meet him, lifting him carefully into the boat, as he had been ill. Then to pull their d—dest. Bill Hicks would see to that; and the quicker they got back to the brig the surer they would be of a tot of rum all round, and a pound of tobacco. But, if they valued their skins, they were not to come back without their passenger. It is not improbable that they were aware of the object and circumstances of the secret service. But—

> Their's not to make reply,
> Their's but to do and die.

The crew of the *Leonora* had, before now, been

in affairs where certain shipmates had lost the 'number of their mess.' Such experience was nothing new to them. 'It was all in the day's work'—one man came back safe and sound, the other 'went to Davy Jones.'

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Nothing could have been more propitious: the silent, moonless night; the sleeping ocean, dark, waveless — unillumined save by the phosphorescence caused by a leaping fish—the sombre surface in Stygian repose. The *Leonora* had approached the dread island long after dark, gradually getting closer by long 'boards.' For a while the low rhythmic murmur of the unresting surge was the only sound which broke the strange silence, almost oppressive in its completeness. Then, as the boat left the ship's side noiselessly, and, rowed with muffled oars, approached the shallows of the beach, a weird confused lament, as of wails, moans, and cries of pain, rose through the murky air. Such was the outcome of periodical seizures, with torturing, lancinating pains, which, towards the later hours of the night, occur with dreadful regularity in advanced or hopeless cases. As they increased in distinctness one might have observed a movement as of shuddering fear among the crew, who peered eagerly through the gloom, beyond which lay the dim white beach, with a fringe of plumy palms beyond. Straining his eyes, the quartermaster in the bow observed dark forms wandering, as it appeared to him, along the seashore. Their gait was slow and faltering; with weak, tremulous steps they seemed as though

doubtful of their ability to reach the point from which to survey the ocean—to look, if better was not to be had, upon the highway to freedom, and that outer world, from which they had been severed once and for ever. They might well have passed for a company of gibbering ghosts on the bank of that dark Lethean stream where earthly joys and sorrows cease.

As the strange band neared the shore, the cries, the moaning, unintelligible chorus seemed to deepen in intensity, and once a scream as of agony unendurable rent the air.

'Hell's gate open now, I guess,' said Hicks; 'and these are Old Nick's beach-combers sent to say, "How'd yer like to come to this afore yer time's up?"' Here his voice altered at once. 'Look out, you Maori Jack! here's our passenger.'

As he spoke, a tall man in a cloak dashed into the sea, and rushed towards the boat, wading above the waist, and holding up his arms beseechingly, while at the same time several of the others made as though to prevent him leaving their party. With a hoarse cry the Maori seized him, and almost lifting him up, dragged him into the boat, while the bow oar descended on the skull of the leading pursuer, who fell back, recovering himself with difficulty. There was no further attempt at capture. 'Give way, men!' shouted Hicks; 'pull for the brig as if she was an eighty-barrel whale.'

The strange passenger sank down as if exhausted, and made no remark or gesture. As the boat foamed up to the *Leonora's* side, a rope-

ladder was let down, up which he—helped by the Maori's strong grasp—climbed in safety. Once on the deck, he seemed to revive, and commenced to thank the Captain effusively. But he declined converse. 'You will find refreshment in your cabin, señor! The steward will direct you. It will be better to defer explanations until the morning. Manuel' (this to the mulatto), 'see that this gentleman has all that he requires for the night. Adios!'

'Adios, indeed!' thought the passenger, who had seen strange things in strange countries, and had picked up Spanish in his wanderings. 'I feel bewildered for the present; I must clear my brain with sleep, if possible; I have had little enough for the last fortnight.'

The breeze off the land by this time had slightly freshened. Sail was made 'alow and aloft,' and as the wavelets commenced to strike and fall off from her bows with increasing volume, the graceful *Leonora* swept smoothly yet rapidly on her course, at a rate of speed which, if there had been pursuit, gave little chance of her being overhauled.

What an awakening it was for Alister Lilburne when, after a night of soundest sleep, he realised that he was many a league from that Isle of the Lost!—was again free, safe, unhampered by rules and hateful regulations such as are found necessary for semi-penal communities.

The morning breeze, the roseate dawnlight, the lapping wave which kissed his cabin-side, the sea-birds' cry,—all these were separate and distinct

joys and sensations which he recognised with a thankfulness too deep for words. When the Japanese steward shortly afterwards, bowing with Oriental humility, proposed to conduct him to a bath-room, and, at the same time, displayed a complete Spanish military uniform, he began to feel once more a resemblance to the man that he used to be, as also a newborn desire to learn how and by whom this change in his affairs had been brought about. Change? Yes! the change from a living grave—a hopeless, despairing existence—doomed to vegetate on the accursed isle till death released him from a state of mental torture all but unendurable. Weekly to witness the long-hoped-for, prayed-for opening of the prison gate for a fellow-victim. But only by the warder Death, or through a merciful alternative—the utter dethronement of reason.

The purifying process complete, and the costume of the hidalgo donned, from which not even the sombrero, with sweeping feather, was absent, his island garments were made into a bundle, loaded with a ringbolt, and cast into the deep. His attendant then informed him that the Captain hoped to have the pleasure of meeting Don Carlos Alvarez at breakfast, at his convenience. Feeling partly like an actor in private theatricals, partly like a man in a dream, he followed Manuel to the smaller cuddy, where fruit and coffee, with a most appetising breakfast, were already set forth.

'I have the honour to salute Don Carlos Alvarez, who has joined my vessel at Santa Cruz

and desires a passage to Norfolk Island. Is it not so?' said the Captain, speaking in Spanish, with formal and impressive courtesy.

'A vuestro disposicion, Señor Capitan!' answered the passenger in the same language. And, indeed, as he surveyed himself in one of the mirrors which, in massive silver frames, ornamented the apartment, he found it difficult to believe that he was not the haughty hidalgo with whom the tales of the Spanish main had made all students familiar.

'I have to thank you,' he continued, still speaking in more or less pure Castilian, 'for my life—for the recovery of my liberty, and all things that men hold most dear. Believe me, I await only the time when I may translate my feelings into deeds, to prove them true. But I would further beg you to add to my obligation, heavy as it is, the reasons for your thus interesting yourself in the affairs of a stranger.'

'That we have not met before, I am aware,' answered Hayston. 'My action is not wholly disinterested, you may probably guess; still, a man's friends may intervene in his affairs—and to some purpose.'

'Friends!' said the stranger. 'How many is an outcast likely to have—outcast of God and man—may He pardon me for the thought!—in that Gehenna from which your skill and courage have rescued me? And if there be, by a miracle, so much as one left to him, who once had many, what power can he have had?'

'The power of the golden key,' said the sea-

rover, looking around, as he spoke, upon wave and sky, as the freshening breeze sent the gay bark on her course with increased speed. 'With a magic force in the background, weather like this, and such a water-witch as the *Leonora* under his foot, why should you, should any man, despair? Exile, sickness, wounds — losses, shipwreck, imprisonment,—everything but the rope or the axe, which ends all things, have fallen to my lot. But I never lowered my flag, and see where it flaunts in the breeze now! Bah! the Spaniard's solace is the guitar; I must send for mine, and sing you one of my favourites,' and here he trolled out the opening verse of 'Yo soy contrabandista!' 'Gad! how the muleteers and smugglers of the Pyrenees used to dance and yell to the music! The very thought makes me young again.' Here he sprang forward, raising his lofty head with a gesture of defiance, as if claiming to be the master of his own destiny, and daring a world in arms to subdue his will or shape his course in life. His eyes glowed with the light of battle—his upper lip curved in scorn—his vast frame seemed to grow in form and stature, as he stood there, towering above his companion, and presenting the contrast of a mediæval mail-clad knight alike to squire and pages as to the leathern-jerkined yeomen of the ranks.

The passenger looked on him with eyes of admiration, as he stood, grand in the possession of unmatched strength—flushed with the triumph of successful enterprise, and glorying in his daring—the daring which had, so many a time and oft,

carried him through perils and desperate encounters, to which this last one was but child's play.

'And now,' said Hayston, taking the passenger's arm, 'let us walk the deck, while I tell you how I became possessed of your history, and was persuaded to mix myself up in your affairs. Can you call to memory the name of a friend who would be likely to be reckless of money and time spent in effecting your release?'

'Of course—there is Lytton Carteret—my wife's cousin—sincerely attached to her, and an early friend of mine—but I have not heard of him for years. He was said to have been travelling in the East.'

'That is so. He informed me that he had nearly reached Lhassa, but had been turned back by a guard of Thibetan soldiers.'

'Then he has returned? And where is he now?'

'He is awaiting the return of the brig *Leonora* at Apia harbour, where he hopes to meet Don Alvarez—now on his travels in the South Pacific.'

'Then he knows of my having left——?'

'Nukuheva, let us say—rather a fashionable resort just now—Lord Pembroke and a friend were staying there for some months lately.'

'A light breaks in on me. Of course I could hear nothing in that inferno, out of the world and the world's life. Do I guess aright that it was he that——?'

'Yes! Señor Alvarez; it was he that engineered this little *coup* of ours. He had made

a *pasear* to Easter Island, where he happened on William H. Hayston, master mariner—whom he met once at the Hokianga, New Zealand—and it came into his head that he might take a hand in this deal. Dollars, of course, were necessary, and he planked down handsomely. Made money in some place in West Australia, I think.'

'But, Captain Hayston, it is my *right* to pay everything which this affair has cost. I shall have funds when I arrive in England. My credit, indeed, is good at this moment in Lombard Street —I insist——'

'In this charter party, I only know Lytton Carteret, and must decline to mix up business with Señor Carlos Alvarez, or any friend or relative. It can be settled with him only after I fulfil my contract; but, until then, I must decline—much as it grieves me—to consider you in any other capacity than as my *passenger*. From that time forward we shall be friends, I trust?'

'Have it your own way, Captain Hayston,' said Lilburne, inwardly smiling at the idea of the buccaneer, as he was often held to be, being scrupulous about extra payment for service rendered. 'In all other respects I shall always regard you as a friend in need, to be trusted in fair weather or foul, to my life's end.' Here he grasped the Captain's sinewy hand, and shook it with a fervour commensurate with the importance of the occasion.

'Buon amigo—malo adversario,' replied Hayston. 'We shall be unlikely to meet again; though, but for hard luck, and the mystery of fate, you and I, and your friend—a man whom I

honour and respect from the bottom of my heart —might have been comrades to our lives' end.'

'And why not now? Surely it is not too late —why not change your career? Why not uproot the ties and habits of early youth—atone for the mistakes—crimes, if you will—of a reckless manhood?—retrace the downward path—repent in sackcloth and ashes—a white sheet, if you like.'

'Fancy "Bully" Hayston in a white sheet!' The absurdity of the situation seemed to strike him, and he laughed till the tears came into his eyes. 'No,' and a sad, stern look came over his changeful brow—'what says Byron, whom I used to read in my youth?

> 'In fierce extremes—in good and ill.
> But still we love even in our rage,
> And haunted to our very age
> With the vain shadow of the past,
> As is Mazeppa to the last!'

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Once more the course was changed—another forty-eight hours would bring the *Leonora* to Apia harbour. Here the erstwhile Spanish Don would be landed. The identification of Alister Lilburne with the Spanish-speaking, Spanish-garmented Alvarez would be difficult, if not impossible.

All that the crew—discreet of their kind—knew, or could testify to, was, that a Spanish-speaking individual had been on board their vessel for a few weeks, and had left them at Norfolk Island. They had heard that he had come from Sydney, and was going back as soon as he could get a ship. Had he come from Molokai? They did not know.

In fact, the four Rotumah men had been carefully prevented from showing themselves on shore, and the rest of the crew had been *advised* by Bill Hicks to recognise no one, and to notice nothing outside of the ordinary cruise of their voyage. They had shipped a cargo of copra at Ponapé, and declined to answer any questions save such as related to island produce.

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Carteret was always reticent as to the route by which he and Lilburne made their way to West Australia — landing at Albany from a German cargo-boat, and parting at Perth. It was discovered after Lilburne had been on board the *Leonora*, that the white mark, more or less circular, on account of which he might so easily have lost his life, as well as his liberty, had no more to do with leprosy than with scarlet fever. It was simply the remains of a cicatrice, resulting from an Arab spear-wound received in one of his desert wanderings in early life. The skin had contracted, after the healing process was complete, and, as often happens, had lost its original colour and shape. Hayston himself — who had taken a medical course in his University days, and was no mean practitioner in the department of wounds, and surgical matters generally—after a minute examination pronounced it to be free from the remotest likeness to the earlier stages of the disease. Not satisfied with this, he called a quartermaster, who had lived on every island in the South Pacific, and had acquired a reputation as a successful medicine-man among the sailors and beach-combers.

'Take a look at Don Carlos Alvarez here, Ben!' said Hayston. 'What d'ye make of it? Any Molokai business about it?'

'No more than there is about this, Captain!' —pointing to a scar upon his brawny chest, right in the centre of a tattooed mermaid's bosom, that marine enchantress being represented as smiling seductively upon a shipwrecked mariner. 'That was a touch I got at the Navigators, when the natives nearly cut us off—a close thing it was, Captain. But it healed up wonderful—and there it is—white enough too. I suppose those cranks at Tahiti would have boxed me up with the other poor devils if I hadn't taken French leave—in a native canoe. But I gave 'em leg-bail for it, and here I am to-day, as sound as a roach, and as good an A.B. as there is in the fleet.'

'That will do, Ben, I am satisfied; you have been two years in the *Leonora*, so your case is proved, at any rate. The fact is, señor, that there was such a scare about the disease when first the native Councils at Honolulu began to legislate, that they went to the other extreme in suspected cases; thinking it better that a few should be wrongfully imprisoned than that infection should run riot over the whole island. To this day, however, medical men are not agreed on the subject of contagion.'

Of course Mrs. Lilburne had been advised by letter from time to time of the possibility of her husband's release. What such hope and expectation meant to these hardly entreated lovers may be imagined. In her case, she was supported by

an unshaken faith in the goodness of God. The belief in which she had been reared had for years furnished her with support and consolation, even in a state of exile, loneliness, and comparative poverty. Was it for her to doubt that He would make a way for her to escape from that lamentable position, when it pleased Him to put a period to her misery? If she was wretched, lonely, forsaken, placed by fate among the sick and the dying, was it for her to repine—to despair? Day by day she saw the strong perish before her eyes—the young and fair—the hopeful and the indifferent. The terrible fever of camps and crowds spared neither age nor sex. Who was she, that she should be specially protected? Rather ought she to be thankful that she was in a position to help the helpless, to succour the dying, to cheer the terrified soul, on the verge of 'the undiscovered country,' with the vision of a serene and glorified hereafter.

So she possessed her soul in patience, finding in unrelaxing, even more zealous devotion to her duties that relief from painful thought which ever accompanies conscientious adherence to duty. In vain her friends adjured her not to neglect her own health. She persisted in 'working herself to death,' as they averred, to the last day—when she went off, carrying the blessings and prayers of the whole community with her. The German boat would be at Perth on an appointed day, when she trusted to coach and train service to enable her to meet her long-lost, despaired-of husband. Over his transports, her tears and sobs of joy when she rushed into the arms of the lover of her youth, the

husband of her choice—raised, as she felt, from the dead—saved, too, from a death of lingering agony, of gradual, yes! loathsome, offensive decay, we may not dwell.

Of their feelings, on an occasion so rare, so unique, in fact, as their reunion under uncommon, even improbable circumstances, only those who have experienced partings—absences—even remotely resembling them, may faintly conceive: the almost incredible change from the dark despair, which invaded every waking moment, which robbed sleep of its healing power — all existence of its zest and flavour, while only the faintest glimmer of hope appeared in life's dungeon to warn off the man from suicide, the woman from that negative existence which would have invited the fell disease among the victims of which she ministered daily, nightly. How many instances had she witnessed among the early workers of the goldfields! Some were unsuccessful at the first onset. Fortune eluded them. Hope deserted the unstable worker—the impoverished wife: the next stage was a pallet in the crowded hospital, all too soon to be followed by the requiem dirge and the funeral train. The environment was depressing, but, encircled by sickness, oft-times alone with death at the midnight hour, no terrors ever caused Elinor Lilburne to swerve for one moment from the undoubting faith of her youth, or to shake her trust in God. 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,' had been a light to her path. And now the Supreme Ruler of events had manifested His loving mercy, in redeeming both

body and soul, and preserving husband and wife for a newer Eden, and the enjoyment of their immortal love.

At the first discussion of ways and means, Lilburne was in favour of at once returning to England, of taking up their old life among friends and relatives. Somewhat to his surprise his wife gently, but no less firmly, dissented from the plan.

'No, Alister,' she said; 'it would be ungrateful, ungenerous even, to quit hurriedly a spot where I have been sheltered, welcomed, and provided for; where I have found friends in the hour of need, nobly sympathetic in their treatment of a stranger. Nowhere could I have met with greater kindness, or assistance more delicately offered.'

'But surely a mining camp, as I understand this Pilot Mount, or whatever it is called, must necessarily be a rude, uncivilised place.'

'You must not say that, Alister, unless you wish to hurt my feelings. In the first place, it is now a city, with a population of sixty thousand people, employed in mines which have paid a million and a half sterling in dividends within the last few years—besides having as inhabitants a larger proportion of high-minded, accomplished, and, in a sense, distinguished people, than many places in the old country, of greater size and apparent importance.'

Her husband took her hand, and smiled indulgently. 'Indeed!' he answered, 'I was not aware that I was on delicate ground. I ought to have made allowance for colonial experience. Isn't that what they call it? And they must have been

people of superior merit, to have appreciated my darling during the years of exile. I feel impatient to make their acquaintance.'

'It will not be difficult to do that; only you mustn't run away with the idea that the inhabitants are all alike, and have no degrees of social rank. However, you will see when we arrive. I should not be surprised if you found goldfields life less disagreeable than you expected.'

'But you don't ask me to stay there?'

'You shall do exactly as you wish. Have I not always been an obedient wife? But I wish to make you acquainted with a strange and unfamiliar phase of colonisation, closely bearing on the well-being of the Empire, about which I know you are an enthusiast.'

'It is an order—as they say in India. When shall we start?'

'Not before next week. I am not going to hurry you off. I have a fortnight's leave of absence, which we must spend at Perth Water. Then I return to my post, to leave everything in order, and say good-bye to my patients. Dear souls! what should I have done without them—or some of them without *me*—I am proud to say.'

. . . . . .

When it was bruited abroad throughout Pilot Mount, and to the West Australian world at large, that Nurse Lilburne had gone to Perth to meet her husband—*had* indeed met him on the incoming *Carl Schiller*, and was returning to resume her position at the Pilot Mount hospital,—also, after putting everything straight, to give up her appoint-

ment, and probably 'go home,' great was the excitement, general the regrets, sincere indeed the sorrow which was openly displayed by her more intimate friends and fellow-workers. Never would they get such another Matron—so wise, so tender, yet so firm, and clever too as an organiser. She had redeemed their hospital from comparative confusion and chaos ; now it was as well managed as any of the metropolitan ones. The Health Officer, the Inspector General, the great doctor M'Diarmid, *every one*, had said so. And now, when it was the pride and joy of 'the field,' here was her husband turning up from nobody knew where, and, of course, to take her away with him. It was most discouraging.

As for the local press—a journalistic flood of wonder and admiration, congratulation and grief, poured over the bars and lodging-houses, the hotel parlours, the stores—the churches even, and flowed and surged, and eddied, throughout the wide regions of 'the field' and its dependencies. The name and fame of Nurse Lilburne, the modern revival of the 'lady with the lamp,' had spread far and wide. The fever-stricken miner, the inexperienced tourist, the youthful governess, the toil-encumbered matron, all owned to deep debts of gratitude, all joined in a chorus of congratulation and heartfelt thanksgiving. 'Heaven had had mercy,' said the devout. 'It is the Lord's doing.' 'First man ever I knowed to come back from where *he's* been,' said South Sea Jack.

It had not generally transpired, nor had it been thought necessary to advertise the fact of his deten-

tion at so evil-reputed a locality. It was generally supposed that pecuniary losses had resulted in his trying to redeem his fortunes in South America, whence he had now returned, having at length fallen upon a 'bonanza' in silver. The environments of the country not being favourable to the habitudes of a refined Englishwoman, it had been decided that she should make a home in Western Australia.

She had formerly elected to take the work temporarily, as the member of a nursing sisterhood; and coming to Pilot Mount in the worst period of an epidemic of typhoid and pneumonia, she had accepted the position of Matron in the newly organised hospital, partly from motives of Christian charity, but chiefly as a means of allaying the torturing anxiety which afflicted every waking hour, and, at times, denied her even necessary sleep.

When it was known, indeed promulgated by the press, that Nurse Lilburne, the devoted, the beloved, the Angel of the Lord (as the Cornish Wesleyans called her), had in the dark hours of fever watched by the bedside of so many a 'Cousin Jack,' and (as was believed) had restored the father or husband to the weeping wife and babes, the enthusiasm thus aroused seemed boundless, uncontrollable.

That she should permanently leave 'the field' was too sorrowful for words—a public calamity, a disaster. Still, if man and wife had come together after years of separation, who would be mean enough to put their loss in the scale against the crowning joy of her happiness?

The situation was not new to them. Many a miner's family, in humbler life, had gone through the same experience. How often had they clubbed together to help to build and furnish the modest cottage, in which the long-separated man and wife could again set up the altar of domestic life, and reinstate the household gods! But in this case it appeared to the leaders—the representative men of the city and the mining community—that an effort should be made to render the recognition of the benefits derived from Mrs. Lilburne's devoted, unselfish labours, worthy of the great principle which she represented: of the invaluable services which she had rendered to all the classes of the community, 'without fear, favour, or affection,' making no distinction between rich and poor—the lowly and those of exalted station.

CHAPTER IX

The probable day of their arrival had been telegraphed from Perth, duly noted and published by the local press. Furthermore, later intelligence from the last stopping-place had been supplied, so that, when, at mid-day, the Perth express steamed into the Pilot Mount platform, there was the largest crowd collected there since the official turning-on of the main of the Great Aqueduct by the Premier of West Australia.

'This seems a busy place,' said Alister Lilburne, as he marked the crowded platform, the equipages great and small, mounted and foot police, ordinary miners in hundreds, besides others who walked in procession, and carried flags—not to mention a camel train, with turbaned Afghan drivers, standing patiently on the outer edge of the assemblage. 'Is this an everyday gathering, or is there any person of distinction expected? What a number of nurses, in uniform too! Ha! a light breaks in on me. Is it—surely not to greet you on your return?'

'I am afraid that all this fuss is about your wife, and no one else, my dear Alister,' she

answered, not without perturbation. 'I expected some kind of greeting, but nothing on so large a scale. Yes! it must be so. Here comes my good friend the Mayor—with the Councillors in their robes too. I suppose we must face it. Gore Chesterfield too, Mr. Southwater, old Jack. I see my friends have "rolled up," as we say here. I am afraid I shall break down.'

'My future rank and position are now irrevocably decided,' said he; 'I shall go down to posterity as Mrs. Lilburne's husband. Very proud of the title, I assure you. Wish for nothing better — only, if only *they* — well! it can't be helped.'

'Do you miss any one, Alister?' she asked, looking anxiously in his face.

'Only two faces, darling! If only Carteret and Hayston were present, what a tone it would have given to the whole thing!'

'Poor Lytton, how he would have revelled in it! As for the bold sea-rover, I shall always pray for him. But perhaps he is safer (and others too) on board that dear *Leonora*. Now for the serious business of the day. Mind you recognise it as such!"

The band struck up the National Air as the Mayor in his robes advanced with dignity, and, bowing respectfully, shook hands with Mrs. Lilburne and congratulated her warmly, greeting also her husband, who was introduced formally to them. His Worship then stood up, and begged to express briefly the pleasure which it

afforded him, and the members of the Pilot Mount Municipal Council, to welcome back a lady to whom, speaking in their name, and as representing the miners of the field, the citizens, and the inhabitants generally, they felt they owed so deep a debt of gratitude (here he paused for a moment, to afford opportunity for a burst of cheering—loud, hearty, and protracted), for her services — valuable — he might say, invaluable, such as they would never forget as long as there was an ounce of gold left in the field, or in West Australia! Here the cheering was long — so protracted that the Mayor held up his hand, and, motioning for silence, concluded his remarks by inviting Mr. and Mrs. Lilburne to a banquet at the Town Hall.

A carriage with four greys was in attendance, into which, in company with the Mayor and Mayoress, the distinguished visitors were handed, and driven to the Town Hall. Arrived at this imposing structure, they were ushered into the Great Hall, where tables had been laid for apparently about a thousand people. On the right hand of the Mayor sat the guest of the day, with the Warden of the Goldfield—a dread and awful potentate, having power of life and death (financially) — beside her; the Lady Mayoress on the left hand of her lord and master (ancient figure of speech now chiefly obsolete). Next to her sat a lately elected Councillor, who was a representative citizen in several departments of industrial and social development, and might be trusted to find her ladyship in light and airy

converse. On either side, as well as at the end of the long table, sat leading mine managers, 'golden hole men,' and mercantile representatives, with, of course, their wives and daughters. In prominent positions were distinguished visitors and tourists, such as General Sir Walter and Lady Cameron, the Honourable Denzil Southwater, Sir John and Lady Woods, and other notables of rank and fashion. With the exception of the memorable gathering when the Great Aqueduct discharged its first bounteous, providential flow, no such gathering had ever been witnessed at Pilot Mount. Full justice having been done to the repast, and the healths of the King and Queen heartily and loyally, if briefly, responded to, the Mayor called upon all present to charge their glasses, as he was about to propose the health of the guest of the day—he might say, the heroine of the hour—Mrs. Lilburne. If he gave her the title of Nurse Lilburne, by which she had been known so favourably to the population of the city, and the goldfields generally, perhaps he would be better understood. That burst of cheering, straight from the heart, showed how miners and workers of all classes recognised their true friends, of whatever class or occupation. He had taken the liberty of describing that lady as a heroine. There had been heroines in the history of our Motherland, who had stood upon the battlefield, ministering to the wants of the wounded and the dying, unmoved by feelings of personal danger; heroines who had dared the risks of plague, pestilence, and famine, with

unshaken courage and faith in an all-seeing Providence; heroines who had donned armour; heroines who had dared hurricanes or shipwreck, calmly pursuing their ministrations until the 'whelming wave' ended the tragedy; but none of these exemplars of womanhood, whether ancient or modern, exceeded in lustre the self-devoted attendant upon the feeble, the stricken, the sick, and the dying, who patiently—at all hours, in all seasons—fought the dread epidemic which had ravaged their city in its earlier days. It had slain a large proportion of the pioneers. Young and old, gentle and simple, tenderly or rudely reared, there had been but little difference in the death-roll. Thank God! the plague had been stayed. Their city was now as free from it and other diseases as the leading metropolitan towns. But they owed it not alone to their excellent medical staff, not to improved sanitation, but, under Heaven, to the nursing staff—among whom the earliest, the most capable, the most unwearied, the most successful in wresting patients from the very jaws of death, was their distinguished—he might say, their illustrious guest, to honour whom they were met that day. He gave them the health of Mrs. Alister Lilburne, more widely known, perhaps more loved and honoured, as 'Nurse Lilburne.'

Long, loud, protracted indeed were the responses of the guests. Heterogeneous as was the assembly, but one feeling—that of deepest gratitude, of heartfelt respect—seemed to actuate the great gathering. When at length Mrs. Lilburne

stood up in her place, and the Mayor requested silence, it was wonderful how suddenly all sound and motion ceased.

She wore her simple nurse's uniform. 'This,' she told her husband, 'is the dress in which I worked, the dress in which I earned the gratitude of these people—out of respect to them, and the sisterhood who worked with me so loyally, I prefer to wear it to the end of the ceremony.'

As she stood there, outwardly calm and collected—although naturally roused to an unwonted state of exaltation by the electrical atmosphere of the assemblage—she spoke the first few words in a comparatively low tone, vibrating though they were with deep feeling and suppressed emotion; but as she became more fully pervaded by the unusual nature of the situation, and the exceptional circumstances under which the acquaintance—the friendship even, with so many now present had arisen, the colour came to her cheek, the dark eyes glowed with a fire none had recollected to have seen before, and with head erect, and fearless mien, she appeared to the excited crowd not only a beautiful woman—as she had always been considered—but as an inspired prophetess, dealing with questions not only of the life here, but of that beyond the grave. Adverting to the formation of the Pilot Mount hospital, and its humble inception by the committee of energetic, liberal-minded men—nearly all of whom she was glad to see here to-day—she congratulated the ladies and gentlemen present on the generous response made to the first appeal for subscriptions.

Money flowed in, not only from the city, but from distant camps and 'rushes.' Rude though the first building was, and humble the couches and pallets, the essentials of careful nursing and skilled medical aid were there. Crowds of patients taxed all their energy, but they were helped and encouraged by the medical staff, then and now self-denying, and generous, she might say munificent, in personal outlay—in giving freely of their time and skill. Every one helped, from his Worship, the Mayor, to the humblest tradesman. Progress was made—a large proportion of cures was effected. Gradually, medicines, scientific appliances and inventions were provided. And now what did they see? A noble building with an efficient staff, a decreasing death-rate — an institution comparing favourably with those of the metropolis, of her connection with which she would be proud to the last day of her life. With a parting word she would say farewell to Pilot Mount and the friends she had made there —friends of all classes—some of whom she had been privileged to help in the hour of need. Not only for this magnificent recognition of her humble work, but for the unaffected respect and sympathy which had been accorded to her since her first arrival as a stranger in the field, was she deeply, sincerely grateful. It would be among her most cherished memories, and would remain with her to the last day of her life. She could not conclude without a reference to not the least important feature of hospital duties and experiences, in which she had been enabled by reason of her opportunities to say

a word in season of a wholly unsectarian nature to those to whose bodily health it was her duty to minister. In the hour of death, almost within view of the Day of Judgment, surely it was appropriate to suggest repentance, to enjoin prayer! She respected the creeds under which all had been reared. No minister of religion had disapproved of her action, and she would now adjure those who, like herself, had felt the dread presence of the Shadow of Death, to recall the resolutions, the vows they had then made, and to act up to them for the rest of their lives. She would be here for a few weeks more; after her departure they would most probably not set eyes upon her in this world again; but she would never forget her friends of Pilot Mount, and would trust that her memory would always be associated with words and deeds worthy of their mutual esteem.

The Warden of Goldfields, 'rising in his place,' begged leave of his Worship the Mayor to speak briefly to the toast they had lately honoured. From his necessarily extensive official knowledge of the miners on this field, he could assert that many of them believed that their lives had been saved by Mrs. Lilburne's skill and devotion to duty. The Chief Commissioner of Police was convinced that her advice and personal influence had prevented one serious riot, and had exercised more weight on the side of law and order than half the force under his command.

. . . . . .

'Now, my dear Alister,' said Elinor Lilburne, when, the function being concluded, they had been

deposited safely at their hotel, after a spirited progress through an excited crowd, which might well have confused a less experienced driver, 'how about the "necessarily rough, uncivilised inhabitants of a mining camp"?'

'I apologise humbly for my presumption in offering an opinion founded upon ignorance the most dense, combined with prejudice the most childish. I shall submit all future statements to my "guide, philosopher, and friend." For the attainment of sound, practical common-sense—combined with perfect manners—I shall always recommend (as I once did hear an English squire of my own county do seriously to a friend's son and daughter) a year's travel in Australia.'

'Now, you are *too* penitent; I don't want that; but you will acknowledge that you have learned a lesson!'

'Lesson! I have gained an experience which I trust to profit by to my life's end. And now, when are we to have this drive to the real Pilot Mount, which I heard you arranging with that good-looking young fellow? May I venture to risk the assertion that *he* is English?'

'You are right there, or nearly so—he is a Scot—the Honourable Denzil Southwater—youngest son of the Earl of Southwater—and a very fine fellow he is. He is thinking of leading an exploring expedition across the desert—where he may find gold, or the other thing.'

'What other thing?' asked Lilburne.

'A death in the Waste,' replied his wife sadly. 'It is a gamble with the King of Terrors. *He*

won in a late encounter. Two brothers—sons of the soil—trained bushmen too, left their bones on the same track last year.'

'Killed by the blacks, I suppose?'

'No! They went off the recognised trail, believing that they would find water, but were deceived. They left a letter written just before delirium set in — with farewells to their kin. Their bones were found by the next exploring party.'

'There are blanks, it appears, as well as prizes —though, after your banquet, it is hard to believe in anything but general prosperity. Fortune of war, of course, and so on.'

. . . . . .

Five o'clock in the afternoon was the hour named, and, faithful to his engagement, Mr. Southwater drove up to the door of the Palace Hotel, with a pair of well-groomed, efficient-looking horses and a double-seated American buggy. This, it may be mentioned, is the accepted vehicle for business, or pleasure, on all gold-fields, pastoral stations, and, indeed, throughout Australia generally — when fashionable metropolitan form is not imperative. If the load be heavy, the American waggonette is employed — which combines the lightness and toughness of the buggy with a weight-carrying capacity unknown to any ordinary vehicle of British origin. The practical advantages of this carriage were enhanced by the addition of a collapsible hood of white canvas, a protection equally from sun, wind, or rain; thus combining lightness,

and a cool appearance, with efficiency. Mr. Southwater had been asked to bring a lady with him, to make the party even, as well as to provide agreeable society for Mr. Lilburne, while his wife sat in the front seat, and conversed with him as driver.

'Whom would you like, Mrs. Lilburne?'

'Oh, I leave that to your taste and discretion. You know everybody in Pilot Mount, as well as in Perth, I believe.'

'If Mrs. Wharton has returned from Perth, she would be the ideal fourth. If not, one of the Harley girls, or Jean White.'

'You accept the responsibility, mind; I won't interfere.'

As it turned out, Mrs. Wharton was still in Perth, and the Harleys had gone to Adelaide. So when they drove up to a house in the suburbs, surrounded by an unusually well-kept garden, and half-covered with a purple flowering tacsonia, a tall and beautiful girl, very well dressed, walked forth, and was introduced as Miss Jean White. Mrs. Lilburne's face became expressive.

'Oh, I see! No one else but the "Fair Maid of Perth" to be found—what a search you must have made. However, I trust you will be as successful in another quest one of these fine days. You have my best wishes, at any rate.'

'I feel sure of that, Mrs. Lilburne, or I shouldn't be here now, should I?'

'I suppose you mean that trifling affair after the skirmish of Pilot Mount.'

'Not at all. Much more serious—the fever I

brought with me from Salt Lake. I don't easily give up, yet I really thought I was gone then. But I see your husband and Miss Jean are getting on quite nicely, and old Hotspur is beginning to paw the ground preparatory to rearing. We had better start.'

One touch—a mere hint from the rein, and away go the fast, impatient pair. The road is smooth, sandy, and just sufficiently firm to make the going perfect; no trees to speak of, a dead level for many a mile, with a faint blue range of hills on the farthest horizon. There had been a shower or two—the dust was minimised.

The low sun brought with it the promise of a graduated coolness, operating until midnight. The conditions of travel were perfect. As the light vehicle, behind the pick of the city harness pairs, swept smoothly on, the sensation was, in its way, pleasurably exciting; the feeling of vast, almost illimitable space—the dry, warm air—the absence of sound or movement other than the slight disturbance caused by the quick hoof-beats and faint whirring of their own wheels, which seemed like a rash intrusion into a vast, hostile, formless region. For a short time conversation had ceased—simultaneously. Miss White was gazing dreamily into the ultimate west, where the cloud scheme had resolved itself into a vast sheet of crimson and gold, deepening at the edges to orange, with gradually intruding blends of lake, pale green and violet.

'A penny for your thoughts, Jean,' said Mrs. Lilburne. 'And suppose we make it binding on

all four of us. We seem to have been suddenly stricken dumb. I wonder what the occult influence could have been? Miss White is to speak first.'

'I was thinking,' said the girl, 'of the strangeness of life here. Civilisation on one hand, with books, music, London fashions, art novelties, scarcely a month old—all the great world's great events published at breakfast time from day to day. On the other hand, to quote dear Sir Walter, "a sun-scorched desert, brown and bare" —and here come the camels to fill in the picture!' As she spoke, a long train wound round the edge of a line of hillocks—their leader, with turbaned attendants, adding the Eastern tone and flavour to the apparition from the underworld.

'Thanks very much,' said Mrs. Lilburne. 'You are evidently destined to make a name in literature, when you elect to traverse that thorny path. What is to be the title?—for a book it must be within the year! Write while the "impulse" is fresh and unquestioned. Now for a title—*The Yellow Slave*, or *Western Whispers*, by "Winifred."'

'You are making me blush,' said the girl. 'Who said I ever wrote? If it were any other person I should call it unkind.'

'My dearest Jean, you are convicting yourself out of your own mouth. I did not say that you *had* written, but that with your poetic tastes and strong turn for idealising our everyday life, you would be certain to write in the future. Not that I should care for your becoming a "writing woman."'

'Now you are disrespectful to authors. Why should I not write? I might give the English cousins a clearer insight into our lives, about which, it seems to me, they are so strangely ignorant.'

'All in good time, my dear! You were intended by Nature for something much better than to write books for idle people to read. What do you think, Mr. Southwater?'

'Quite agree with Mrs. Lilburne,' said the young man, looking upon the lovely *ingénue* with such manifest admiration that she turned to Lilburne, and playfully besought his aid against her opponents.

'Miss White is perfectly within her rights in extracting intellectual pleasure from the scant materials which lie around her. She is making the world at large her debtor by doing so. On the other hand, is the game worth the candle? Think of the careworn expression, the harassed nerves, the premature departure of youth—that divine if ephemeral gift. And all for what? For the sake of a book which half the world don't understand, and the other half dislike.'

'But think of the pleasure of being successful—really successful! What a glorious privilege! And such a joy while one is writing! I think I should die with ecstasy over a real triumph.'

'Trust me—believe me, my dear Miss White, I have known writers, successful ones, too, of both sexes, and they were mostly disillusioned, if not disappointed. No, my dear young lady, the kind gods have blessed you with the chief treasures of this mortal life—health, youth, warm friends,

and, I might say, the highest endowment of all. Tempt not the jealous goddess.'

'All this is very fine, and, no doubt, elevating,' interposed Mrs. Lilburne; 'but suppose we revert to the practical. Here we are at Pilot Hill, a place where romance has been acted—not merely written about, as Mr. Southwater, quite among friends, might tell us if he would.'

'Nothing much to tell,' said that young man, who, like all men of true heroic mould, hated talking about his deeds of valour. 'Only a quick thing, soon over. Casualties few. Enemy routed with loss.'

'What a shabby account of a real affair of outposts. Here's Jean dying to hear about it. You *were* wounded, you know, or was it Lord Newstead? We can't let you off. Support me, Jean, love! Look at her, Mr. Southwater.'

The girl, who had been gazing at Southwater with a world of interest, admiration, and pained sympathy in her beautiful eyes, dropped them at this appeal, and could only murmur pleadingly, 'Please do.'

The young fellow was but a man. Thus adjured he would have been more than mortal if he had resisted such an appeal.

'Now, Mrs. Lilburne, this is hardly fair. But I'm not a public character, and I know I can rely on you not to give me away. So here goes, while we walk the horses up the hill:—

'The night was hot and steamy. I was sitting in my tent writing home, and Newstead was talking to Minniekins—really half the credit belongs

to her, for she gave us warning, you know. We were enjoying the quiet loaf, when suddenly she began to growl—not a bark, but a low, suspicious, disapproving note, hinting at undesirables. It was too dark to see more than a few yards; but Minniekins rarely made a false point.

'We had finished a big clean up, and were mostly tired—perhaps a trifle sleepy. I stopped writing and watched. Minniekins kept on growling. On a sudden she burst into a fierce bark. Then I heard an oath, and a sharp yell of pain, after which she went on barking worse than ever. Then the scoundrels made their rush—it was a "put-up thing," I mean planned beforehand—and the scrimmage began.

'A fellow jammed a revolver into my face, which I instinctively knocked up, knocking him down with a left-hander at the same time.

'His "gun," as Americans call it, fell wide of him, and I grabbed it before he got on his legs again. I heard shots while this little bit of business was going on, and Mr. Banneret got a scratch—a close shave all the same. My man was soon made safe, and I was just in time to see Newstead laid out with a bullet through his left shoulder, not so far from the heart. A police detachment came in on the top of the shindy; but the battle was over. A tall man lay dead not far from the gold-room—poor Dick Andrews was down, and played out; but he had saved Banneret's life by dropping "Long Jack" as the tall scoundrel—a noted criminal from another colony—was taking a second shot.

'Old Jack, who was just going to the township, and, being in full fig, had of course got his six-shooter, had fired right and left with good effect, so that when the Inspector lined up with the flower of the police force, fully armed, there was nothing to do but to carry off the wounded and bury the casualties. That was our Waterloo —short, sharp, and decisive; if it hadn't been for Minniekins, we should have been taken, wholly unprepared—like the War Office in the Boer War. I think she ought to be decorated for it.'

'And Lord Newstead — I suppose he recovered?'

'I can answer for that,' said Mrs. Lilburne, 'as I had him under my care for a month, and a very refractory patient he was. He went home by the next P. & O.'

'Of course he did,' said Southwater, in an aggrieved tone, 'and swelled about with his arm in a sling, giving himself the airs and graces of the wounded warrior, and letting the girls wait upon him all the way to Marseilles, under the impression that "his heart was weak," and all sorts of humbug, while Chesterfield and I had to come back here and—er—take up the weary round of toil and what's-its-name.'

'Well, it seems to agree with you, Mr. Southwater,' said the girl, smiling in so bewitching a fashion that a man might have been nerved to even greater exertion than such as was demanded from the shareholders in a mine which had reached the dividend-paying stage, and *such* dividends too,

as the 'Last Chance, Limited,' was even now disbursing.

'"All's well that ends well," is a comfortable proverb. I feel pretty well, thank you, Miss White, and am gratified for the compliment. But here is old Jack coming forward to welcome this honourable party, and to do the honours in proper goldfield style.'

That venerable ancient now arrived on the scene, his bronzed and gnarled countenance wrinkled into an expression of welcome, which seemed with difficulty to adapt itself to his rugged face. The intention, however, was unmistakable.

'Proud to see you, Mrs. Lilburne—and Miss Jean. Lord love her, hasn't she growed into the beauty of the world! How you've shot up, to be sure! It's many a long year since your father and I met on the other side. Well, he was always lucky—in more ways than one—that I'll say and stand to. Glad to see you, sir! Like to see the mine? Saw the big silver mine at Los Angelos, did you? I was there many a year ago. Didn't ought to have come away neither. But I was a "forty-niner." Couldn't help following the rush to 'Frisco—what a time it was! There'll never be anything like it again while the world lasts.'

'My husband would like to see the machinery,' said Mrs. Lilburne. 'What a grand view you've got!'

'That's what I thought when I first seen it, ma'am. I was pretty well told out when I got here first—thought I'd turn round and get back

while I'd a little strength left. But I couldn't help standin' still to look at the view. The sun was just a-settin', and there was a kind of gold and red look over that far plain country. So, thinks I, it looks mean to cut away back without proving one or two of these "gulches"—that's what we called them in San Francisco. So I stayed and camped—and next day if I didn't fall plum centre on the—the——'

'The Great Pilot Mount Reef, going twenty ounces to the ton,' said Mr. Southwater, 'which you're going to show these ladies and Mr. Lilburne—not forgetting a five-ounce nugget for Miss White.'

'We've been breaking down the south end of the reef to-day, and got some pretty coarse gold, so the ladies has come at a good time, sir. Please to follow me, and we'll see what we can do. It ain't every day we see a young lady like Miss Jean. Lord bless and prosper her!'

So the party was introduced to the 'shift boss,' with other leading officials and men in authority; afterwards to be lowered down in the 'cage' to where men were working two hundred yards from the surface, in narrow alleys with gleaming white or pink walls of quartz, in which were golden streaks. Narrow bands of dull red or yellow metal, almost unrecognisable as the root of all evil, and the lure for which men—ay, and women—bartered soul and body, and were content to work in hunger, dirt, rags, and wretchedness, if only they could gain a sufficiency of the dross, so called, which people profess to despise, but which

all men covet and hanker for to their lives' end.

The atmosphere was hot and humid ; the men at work in these lower levels might have passed for Red Sea stokers, as they laboured with tense muscle and sinew.

To what purpose this labour was expended—so far from the light of the sun or the fresh air of heaven—a visit to the treasure-chamber, in one side of the great gallery, was recommended. There the person in charge of the gold pointed out some of the specimens which had recently been sent in. Besides these there was the retorted gold.

After the gold was extracted from the innocent-looking matrix, it was poured into shapes, one of which, looking like the half of that anchor of British loyalty and instinctive reverence to the Empire, the British plum-pudding, the guardian had more than once offered to an adventurous damsel 'on tour'—if she could *carry it away* : a challenge sometimes accepted ; but in all cases the weight proved too great for the fair arms which so lovingly enfolded the bullion. However, fragments of the pure, precious metal were extracted from the glittering heap and handed to Mrs. Lilburne and the fair Jean, with apologies, even entreaties that they would deign to accept them, and so bring good luck to the mine, and all who laboured in it.

'I must say,' said Lilburne, after marking with experienced eye the various indications on this and other 'drives' (galleries), and workings generally, 'that this country of yours appears to me more

wonderful every hour I spend in it. Think of a solitary traveller, "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," dropping upon a property like this, and, what is more noteworthy, being able to keep possession of it.'

CHAPTER X

'All this is very nice,' said the fair damsel, who had refused to accept another pennyweight of gold, 'but the sun is going down, and I *must* see the exact spot where the battle was fought, where Mr. Newstead lay, and where the tall robber fell dead; also where old Jack stood when he "opened business on his own account"—I should like to have been there, I confess.'

'Next time, Miss Jean, we will let you know,' replied Southwater; 'but come with me, and I will show you all the points of the attack, and where our camp stood.'

Scrambling up the narrow path, the young people reached the conical flat-topped boulder near the summit, where the 'frontal attack' of the gold-robbers had been made. Exclaiming that 'she was out of breath,' the girl seated herself upon the historic stone—to be famous henceforth in the legends which are so apt to grow and develop with age.

'What a curious sensation it must be to be shot at!' she said, gazing dreamily over the trackless Waste, where the red sunset spread a wondrous

blazonry, weirdly gorgeous in the pageant of the fading eve. 'How did you feel, Mr. Southwater?'

'There's no time to feel anything unless you're hit. Newstead said it was like a crack with a stone—hardly realised till you drop; then, of course, you are all the time wanting to get at the other fellow. At least that's my experience. It was all so sudden: I had only just written home to my friends, saying it was absurd to think of a goldfield as rude and lawless—that, in fact, it was *much* safer than London at midnight. A minute or two afterwards, we were fighting for our lives and hard-earned gold; more surprising still—but —perhaps——'

'Oh! go on, pray,' pleaded Miss Jean, whose interest was now fully aroused, as was evidenced by her sparkling eyes and changing colour—'what *could* be more surprising?'

'I only meant that it was queer, though folks at home wouldn't realise it, that our best and boldest defender, poor Dick Andrews, who really won the fight for us, turns out to have been a notorious criminal, known in connection with the death of an Inspector of police in another colony.'

'Poor fellow! perhaps he had suffered injustice —one never knows. What became of him?'

'He was mortally wounded in the engagement, and made an edifying end next day, happy in the thought that his wife and children were provided for.'

The girl was silent for a little space, and then said in a changed voice, 'Can you tell me, Mr. Southwater, can any one explain, why what are

called bad men are so much more interesting than ordinary well-behaved people? They should not be, but that they are there's no denying.'

'Hard to say—must be a natural sympathy for what Marcus Clarke calls "the thoroughbred upstanding criminal." Sort of glamour—particularly affecting women, strange to say. Men understand the breed better. And yet any one more unlike the received notion of the hardened outlaw than poor Dick couldn't be.'

'Now, what was he like?'

'The regular Sydney-side native. Tall, spare, muscular, or, rather, sinewy of frame, with regular features, chiefly unrelaxed, but wearing a pleasant expression at times. Low-voiced, and unpretending in demeanour, though wonderfully good at all manner of bush work. Reserved, for reason good, as may be imagined, yet respected "on the field," and held to be liberal in all that concerned his fellow-workers. A perfect horseman, as a matter of course.'

'I shall begin to cry if we go on much longer,' said the fair Jean, 'and Mrs. Lilburne will be mildly reproachful, dear soul! if we are late for dinner.'

So these young people lost no time in joining their friends, and the buggy pulled up at the Palace Hotel in something like 'record time' between 'the Mount' and the city, which, indeed, had been carefully noted, and was publicly known to all who had pretensions to sporting accuracy.

The next morning saw the departure of Alister Lilburne and his wife from the Gold City, which

had been to her a refuge, nay, a home—a retreat from the pressure of care, the uncertainty of position, for all these days ; departure from the people whom she had learned to love, and who had loved her with the deep, abiding conviction based upon gratitude and respect, which outlives ephemeral popularity—becoming welded into a cult or, as in Eastern lands, into a Faith. Whatever might have been the feelings with which the ordinary population of Pilot Mount regarded their late Hospital Superintendent, a handsome and indeed munificent endowment, to be devoted to the building and fitting up of a new wing, testified to Elinor Lilburne's enduring interest in the welfare of the institution to which she had devoted some of the best years of her life.

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Arnold Banneret's financial status had now developed by such 'leaps and bounds,' to use the handy parliamentary phrase, that he found himself placed in an entirely novel position—one, indeed, of which he had never had previous experience ; nor had he, in any mood of day-dreaming, been confronted with such. Yet, now, a decision must be made—a momentous question settled definitely. His income, large even for a golden claimholder, was annually increasing. Money was no object, to speak familiarly, yet it was the question before the House—the Legislative Council represented by himself, personally ; and indeed he had been an M.L.C. for some years, in right of which, and a talisman worn on his watch chain, he was entitled to free railway passage throughout the length and

breadth of New South Wales. It was a pity that it did not apply to all British dominions, some of his fellow-legislators thought; but that privilege could not be arranged just yet. Still, in that day, when the United States of Australasia, with a population of a hundred millions, dominating the South Pacific, from New Guinea to Victoria Land within the Antarctic Circle, in alliance, too, with the United States and the Dominion of Canada, form a Pan-Anglican Power, prompt and efficient to regulate the world's war and peace, who shall say them nay?

The voyage home! Of this momentous 'trip,' as it was called in light, almost sportive reference, the now successful, honoured, and wealthy Australian proprietor had often thought. But neither the means nor the opportunity for such a decisive movement had as yet been forthcoming. The children had been too young, the financial outlook too restricted, in his earlier married life. Not that he or his wife had any ardent desire to make the change. They were attached to their native land; the climate agreed with them—they were not sure that the rigorous seasons of the ancestral isle would suit the immature brood, in which were centred the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, of their daily life. It had been relegated by consent to the region of by and by, where so many of the fairy legends of childhood were to come true; and now, slowly, imperceptibly, yet not less surely, the years had flown. Those years which divide early manhood and womanhood from middle age had departed never to return.

The future—the 'by and by'—which had loomed so far and mist-coloured in their early life, had been overtaken. It had become the present, to be felt and reckoned with. The children had grown up. Of the boys, one was at Cambridge, the other working hard to pass exams., and panting for the happy day when he should see his name gazetted for a commission in an Imperial cavalry regiment. Of the girls, younger by several years, Hermione, almost ready to 'come out,' as the Society phrase is; the others, schoolgirls, receiving daily tuition from governesses, music masters, teachers of drawing, singing, languages,—all the varied education which goes to equip the modern maiden for her place in the ranks of womanhood.

Now these young people had a natural ambition to 'see the world.' They had read widely, if not deeply, and were impatient to have tangible evidence of the historic glories of older lands. Of paintings and statuary their knowledge had been necessarily limited, although far from ordinary collections had been accessible in the galleries and museums of the metropolis in which they resided, and others which they had visited. Their artistic tastes, though not wholly unformed, were capable of higher development. They yearned for closer acquaintance with the capitals of the world—the ancient world. They ardently desired to behold Rome, Venice, Greece, Paris, Cairo. Reading was delightful. They could never be sufficiently grateful to their parents who had indulged their legitimate enthusiasm to the fullest

amount possible to their opportunities. But, of course, it was not, could never be the same. They longed to stand upon the Bridge of Sighs, 'a palace and a prison on each hand'; to watch 'Old Tiber through a marble wilderness rise with her yellow waves'; to visit the Coliseum by moonlight; to stand on Mars Hill, and 'yon tower-capped Acropolis, which seems the very clouds to kiss,'—in short, to view all sorts of instructive, entrancing places. After such experiences they did not care what happened. They would have seen everything worth seeing. They could no longer be classed as 'mere colonials'—they would be citizens of the world—akin to the most enviable sections of English society. Mrs. Banneret, though with less enthusiasm, agreed in the main with her daughters. Time and circumstance were propitious. Who could tell whether so favourable a combination would remain unaltered?

Besides, she was anxious to see her sons once more. It was nearly three years since they had left their native land. Her husband secretly sympathised, though for a different class of reasons. He had not, could not have, the instinctive, passionate yearning with which the tender maternal heart agonises, so to speak, for the embrace of the sons whom she has brought into the world; for the sight of their dear faces; to feel once more the touch of cheek, of lips, of handclasp; to hear the joyous exultation of greeting after long absence; to mark anew the likeness to either parent, which the advancing

years may have imprinted yet more distinctly on face or form.

In a measure, of course, Arnold Banneret shared these sacred sensations. He was proud of his boys, of their good looks and athletic development; fond of them also, although with less intensity than the mother that bore them—holiest and most ancient tie. He had watched over their education up to the University stage, and now, having, as he told himself, done his duty by them, awaited with some anxiety, though with reasonable confidence, the choice of a profession which it behoved them to make. For himself, he looked forward, of course, with pleasurable anticipation to revisiting the scenes, so fondly remembered, of the halcyon time of early manhood, when, fresh from college, he had roamed over the Continent with a comrade of congenial culture. Together they had followed the course of the majestic, solemn Rhine—mused over the ruined towers of Sternfels and Liebenstein—gazed at Rolandseck, at once the pride and beauty of the noble river. Rome, Athens, Florence, Paris — how the rapture of travel, the joy of companionship, the careless wanderings over hill and dale, city and plain, came freshly back! Could but one's youth return!

Alas! how few of the comrades of that joyous time are left, even in middle age. Hope is fled; the anticipation of a perhaps romantic future no longer cheers the sober monotony of life. We know the best that *can* happen. We fear lest the worst should come suddenly into our life, like some

monster of the wood, unseen, unsuspected before. Such are, such may be, the brooding imaginings of the later life.

The Honourable Arnold Banneret, as for years he had been styled, was able to combat them by reflecting that, at any rate, he had played a man's part in life, at first with moderate, then with exceptional success. He had sons wherewith to meet his enemies in the gate. There was little doubt —he thanked God—of their courage and intelligence. Why then this dark hour, these depressing doubts?

As a corrective, he proceeded at once to the office of the P. & O. Company, and took his passage for London. After securing the requisite number of comfortable cabins in the *Lhassa*—the latest addition to the fleet of noble liners which, since their introduction by the great Association of ship-owners, has enabled Australian colonists to travel with speed and economy, with comfort, even luxury—he returned to lunch at Redgrove, with spirits considerably improved, and in a frame of mind more nearly akin to that in which he was accustomed to prepare for a long overland journey in the days of 'long ago.' 'How strange it is,' he told himself, 'that on the eve of an important voyage, or undertaking, a feeling of doubt and depression should so often manifest itself. One involuntarily recalls the presentiments which came true—of shipwreck, of hurricane, fire, or mutiny, following the gloom and almost despairing prevision of disaster. Of the numberless successful undertakings and fortunate voyages no record is

kept. "Fears of the brave and follies of the wise" are not far to seek in the connection.'

Sir Walter Scott, in success most modest, in adversity truly undaunted, even he owns to an unreasonable cloud of doubt and irresolution, including a ghostly murmur, 'Do not go, Walter,' which he solemnly affirms to, and that nearly led him to give up an expedition which afterwards turned out to be most beneficial, fortunate, and even marked by distinguished adventures.

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The eventful day, fortunately fine, came at last. It was in the opening week of March—the first month of the southern autumn, mild with clear skies, cool bracing nights and mornings. The winds in that halcyon time were still: the north wind no longer swept across the plains of the inmost desert, bringing burning heat, dust-storms, and wrathful cyclones in its track to the cities of the coast.

All nature, before the advent of winter, appeared to be entering upon a dreamless slumber. The winter, dread season of the austere North, was but relatively severe—cool, rather than cold, with the exception of the mountain heights, where snow fell in early autumn and lay until spring was fairly advanced.

Packing and preparing for the momentous family event was therefore divested of its less agreeable features, while the inevitable process of leave-taking, with farewells to friends and relatives, was transacted under the most favourable circumstances—a bright sun and fair wind, not too pro-

nounced. At the appointed hour the bell rang, the shoreward division was politely requested to hasten their departure, and the huge liner moved gracefully from the wharf, and with calm, resistless force was soon breasting the wavelets between those frowning rock-portals, the Sydney Heads.

On that auspicious, long-remembered day, everything went well. The young people, for the first time in their lives on 'blue water,' walked the decks until the time for preparing for dinner arrived.

At this important function they were placed in the seat of honour at the captain's table, and near that august, autocratic ruler—Mrs. Banneret, indeed, on the commander's right hand, and other members of the family in close proximity. The whole service was admirable in their eyes; the menu varied, and excellently cooked. Military and naval officers, with Indian passengers getting off at Colombo, gave a pleasant, half-foreign tone to the company. By the time coffee was introduced, and the adjournment to the row of deck-chairs and lounges made, Hermione and Vanda were convinced that a 'voyage home' was a fairy-tale experience, merely the overture to a dramatic performance of dazzling variety and enjoyment.

'What a new life this is, compared to our existence in Sydney!' exclaimed Hermione to her mother, as together they paced the deck, leaving their father to sit between Vanda and the younger girls, answering their endless questions.

'Oh, I am so delighted that you persuaded father to make the plunge, and take us home!

I was afraid that he might suddenly get bad news from Pilot Mount, or a bank, or something, and say it was impossible to go; you never can be sure, until you are actually on board, and off—really off. Even then the Bardsleys actually came back from Colombo, for some trumpery reason—the climate did not agree with their aunt, or some one. I believe the elder girls went on by themselves. I couldn't have done that, could I, mother? but you must own it was heart-breaking.'

'It is like many things that have to be endured in this life, my darling!' said the fond mother, tenderly parting the bright hair of the girl, now in the first flush of youthful beauty; for they were a handsome family, the Bannerets—vigorous in mind and body; devotedly attached to each other and to their parents; clever in their way, though perhaps not of the highest order of intellectual development, but highly intelligent, and sympathetic to all the higher ideals. What was wanting in early and thorough training was compensated by energy, courage, and the fervent desire to approve themselves fitted for the front ranks in all departments of human effort.

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The voyage came to an end, much like other voyages to the home-land, the Mecca of Australian-born colonists, the ancestral isle—the sacred soil, hallowed by a thousand traditions with which all are chiefly familiar from early childhood, but on which not all are privileged to tread. To those who, from narrow circumstances, increasing age,

or other reasons, the priceless privilege has been denied (and there have been cases of highly cultured, indeed eminent personages, who, with a curiously accurate knowledge of London town and suburb, have yet never *seen* either), the omission has caused a regret which only ended with life ; while those who can talk of British country houses, and the green lanes of 'merrie England,' bear themselves ever afterward with a sense of superiority over their less fortunate friends and relatives. Unvexed by storms, the good ship *Lhassa* pursued her course to Colombo the paradisial, where first the glories of a possible Eden—with flower and fruit, primæval forest and mystic mountain summit, the whole set like a many-coloured jewel within the girdling wave and glowing tropic sky—were revealed to their enraptured gaze. They left this charmed region after a survey all too brief, registering a vow, separately and collectively, to revisit the magic isle, the splendour of which they would recall in their dreams. However, the next best thing would be the sights and sounds of the city of the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid, the dream-palaces of Zobeide and Amina—the one-eyed Calendars, transformed princes, and Grand Viziers. Here they were promised a fortnight's stay, in which they could revel in the 'havoc and glory of the East' to their hearts' content.

This, too, came in due course. Not alone were the immortal memories of the *Arabian Nights* recalled before their wondering eyes, with water-carriers, black slaves, veiled women, pacha and dragoman, camels and Arab horses, with gems

of Easternrie like the sands of the sea for multitude ; but more modern delights, perhaps, on the whole, not less alluring to the immature feminine mind—the grandeur and magnificence of the Savoy Hotel, with the dresses and jewels of the fair visitors who made Cairo a winter resort. Whatever sins of omission the Banneret family had to charge themselves with in after years, the complete and thorough exploration of Grand Cairo and its environs was not among them. They 'did' the historic place conscientiously and thoroughly. The Sphinx, the Pyramids, the Museum at Boulak ; the Nile, up to the first cataract ; the citadel, the Mosque, the Palace of Sweet Waters,—all the regular, and some of the irregular sights. Nothing was neglected. The girls, indeed the whole party, rode well. Mrs. Banneret had been a daring horsewoman in her youth, and though motherhood had necessarily abated her enterprise, the courage which neither poverty, sickness, fatigue, nor mortal pain had power to tame, was still unshaken, and enabled her to bear her part in the expeditions in which the family revelled. Her willowy figure, but little altered from the days of girlhood, was admirably suited for equestrian exercise. She, like the rest of the family, delighted in the glowing atmosphere of the desert, and, now that circumstances had conspired to free her from the trammels of housekeeping, she surrendered herself unreservedly to the enchantment of the hour.

'What a glorious experience this is for the children—for all of us, indeed!' she exclaimed

more than once. 'I think you and I, Arnold, enjoy the whole thing nearly as much as they do—the foreign surroundings, the verification of old history and legend, the aloofness of all things from the rawness, if I may use the word, of their native land.'

'Yes,' he replied; 'one seems to absorb everything in a deep, unuttered spirit of thankfulness; and while contented with our lot in life, we have one feeling in common with some of our fellow-visitors at the hotel: a conviction—I speak of Lord Westerham and that South African millionaire who came to the Savoy last week—that our financial position is assured, impossible for anything to alter. We are, however, in a higher position than the millionaire. With him brain work and anxiety have told a tale. His health is impaired. They say he suffers terribly from insomnia, than which I can imagine nothing more agonising. A man whom I knew, otherwise enviably placed, finding that change of air combined with a sea voyage had no effect, hired a cab one day, went out for a short drive, and shot himself.'

'What a dreadful thing to do! He must have been insane.'

'Not necessarily. The mental torment, unrelieved by "sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care," had reached the stage when it became unendurable. People are not necessarily mad when they elect to face the problem of the Great Hereafter.'

'I cannot but think that they *are*,' said she, 'or they would remain to confront the ills of life, rather

than be false to every duty and callous to the suffering of those whom they leave behind. But the idea is hateful to me. I cannot bear to discuss it.'

The days of dreamy delight in the land of the Pharaohs came all too swiftly to an end. The season had advanced. If they wished to see the glorious greenery of England in the spring, they could not afford to linger among the ruins of the past, however stupendous or awe-striking. It was determined to make one halt, and one only. As there were three women of the party, what doubt could there be of the decision? They were to visit Paris! A short sojourn in Malta produced a cry of delight from the girls as they walked from Nix Mangiare stairs to the Strada Reale. A drive to St. Paul's Bay, a fleeting vision of the drawbridges and fortifications, of narrow streets and lofty houses; mule-carts, mantillas, and water-carriers; priests with sombre robes and broad-leafed hats. There was so much to see, and but little time in which to do it. The Governor's Palace was visited, reminiscent of Grand Masters; L'Isle Adam, and doubtless de Beaumanoir, so hard and unrelenting, in the case of the noble and unhappy Rebecca; the ramparts where, guarded by iron railings, were fosses of awful depth, besides old-world towers and batteries, which the Moors in past centuries had good cause to dread. Another day was granted in favour of a visit to the Church of St. John.

'Oh, we should be disgraced,' said Hermione—'have to hide our heads in shame—if we dared to say that we had spent a day in Malta and had not

been inside that most lovely church! Think of the Knights of Malta! Why, we are standing on their marble tombstones! De Rohan—think of the motto: "Ni prince, ni roi, Rohan je suis." Isn't that it? Perhaps Bois-Guilbert lies not far off—no, he can't be; he was a Templar. Far from respectable, I daresay; but one can't help loving him—can you now? Rebecca preferred Wilfred, probably because he was fair and she was dark. I've noticed that contrasts in complexion tend that way.'

'If such nonsense is the outcome of your visit to Malta, we need not have lost a day,' said Mrs. Banneret. 'Pray bring your thoughts more into harmony with the surroundings. Listen to that wonderful music—the organ is heavenly, and that soaring soprano might be the voice of an angel. I wonder at you, my dear!'

'Oh, mother dear, forgive me!' pleaded the penitent; 'I did not intend to be irreverent; but whether it is the lovely air, or the intoxication of travel, I can't say, for one's tongue seems to run along of itself. I won't offend again.' And here tears dimmed the bright eyes of the sensitive maiden, as mother and child embraced over one of the few differences which ever ruffled the calm of their deep mutual love.

Mr. Banneret making his appearance with the two younger girls, explanations were deferred, and the party made their way homeward.

Only a short stay, limited to the time necessary for the purchase of *articles de Paris* and the indispensable shoes and gloves, was made in Paris,

the all-important dress question being left to a more convenient season, when it and the leisurely Continental tour could be thoroughly enjoyed. At present the parents, although indulgent to the border-line of prudence, were actuated by motives unconnected with the enjoyment of picture galleries, gardens of Armida, or military reviews, where the striking uniforms of Zouaves and Spahis delighted the girls. Mrs. Banneret yearned with all the intensity of the maternal heart to see her boys again.

The head of the family had not said much on the subject, and, save the sharer of his joys and sorrows, none had heard him open his heart upon a matter which nevertheless lay very near it—had indeed caused him more anxiety than he cared to express. 'How are these boys of mine likely to turn out?' was a query which arose in his mind at early dawn, when he always awoke; sometimes, although not often, in the watches of the night; occasionally during the day with insistent pertinacity. He had seen so many cases where early moral training, a good example, a liberal education, good society, and good advice had been all too powerless to stem the downward current of indolence, extravagance, and dissipation. The fatal knowledge that for them, at least, there was no necessity for industry, self-denial, or economy, overbore all old-fashioned arguments, as they considered them to be.

'The governor,' thus referred to in latter-day speech, 'had made "pots of money"—it had been all right for *him* to work and slave in the queer

early times that old buffers yarned about. He was bound to do it, of course, or go under. But they were *not*—that made all the difference. They were sorry to disagree with him—he wasn't half bad, the old governor—in fact, a dashed good sort. But he wasn't up to date! He had no idea of how a chap had to chuck the coin about, to keep in the front rank, nowadays. He *must* have the necessaries of life. Think of what polo costs! You couldn't get a decent pony under fifty or sixty quid; then you must have a boy—a smart one too; two ponies were little enough—safer to have four, in case of accidents. Fellah must be decently dressed if he goes out at all—and tailors, if they were any good, charged such infernal prices! He'd a fairish allowance, but last Cup Day made a hole in it'—and so on—and so on.

This was the way the sons of his old friends talked; this was the way they acted—sad to relate. He heard them at the clubs—where they came down late for breakfast, looking as if they required a 'strongish nip' to steady their nerves. They confessed with cheerful confidence that 'supper after the theatre had not been conducive to appetite. They really intended to take a pull some day—perhaps get married. But, really, Sydney and Melbourne had become such infernally dull holes that there was nothing to keep a fellow from goin' to sleep except bridge and billiards—which didn't always pay.'

Would it not be worth while to try politics for a little excitement? was suggested. There

was the landed interest to develop legitimately—or indeed to defend. A wave of socialism had arisen, was indeed likely to become a tidal wave if no effort was made to arrest the doctrine of which among the earliest expositors was the late lamented John Cade.

'What!' cries 'the heir of all the ages'—'mug up Goldwin Smith, Herbert Spencer, and those other Johnnies—to rub shoulders with a lot of fellows that drop their *h*'s all over the shop? Shouldn't get in, for one thing—and, if I did, why there's hardly a gentleman in the whole caboodle!'

'Whose fault is that?' queried the senior. 'Have you ever tried?—or have any young men of your class, except Wharton and Conyers, and what are they among so many?'

'Don't know that I have—not built that way. Some fellahs like that sort of thing—I don't.'

'Of course it doesn't matter. It might interfere with your amusements. Then you don't mind that the laws are being made by the people you despise and won't associate with—laws to bind your children—and their children after you—if you ever have any: you've lost the chance of modifying them—or blocking the suicidal and destructive ones. Laws made by men without capital in land or business—chiefly without culture, often without character; laws made to bind that part of the population who are handicapped by the possession of qualifications anciently held to be titles to respect—now held to place them below the swagman, the loafer, the drunkard, and the

pauper, as guarantee for place and power! How does that strike you?'

'Well, it does look mean—rather a crowd of "rotters" to belong to—I must think it over—I'm popular round about old Banda-widgeree—I think I'll have a shy for the district next election if it's not too late. I'm almost afraid it is. They're talking of nationalising the goldfields—the land—the railways. Hang it!—they'll want to nationalise a fellah's bank-balance next.'

'They'll do that by a side wind, and if they have the voting power on their side—as they have pretty well now, what with adult and female suffrage: ten thousand female voters in a metropolitan constituency against *nine* thousand male voters—whose fault is that?'

'I'm afraid our crowd had most to do with it by letting things drift—and I'm as bad as anybody. Good-bye—thanks—I do see things a trifle more clearly. Perhaps I'll stand after all.'

Arnold Banneret had listened to, indeed joined in, a conversation much resembling it one day. It deepened the lines on his brow, which were beginning to be more pronounced than the advance of time warranted.

CHAPTER XI

'Suppose Reggie and Eric turned out like that young fellow!' he told himself. 'What good would my life do me? Next to marrying one of the daughters of Heth (the real, original millstone round a man's neck), what hope, satisfaction, or comfort should I have in life? Is all my work, thought, self-denial, and drudgery to go for nothing? Shall I see as my male heirs and successors a couple of well-dressed, good-looking "moneyed loungers," loafing through life with no more interest in the great drama of existence than the supernumerary at a fashion play? Less useful, indeed, than the disregarded "super," for he works for his humble wage; and these *nati consumere fruges* don't even do that.'

These reflections gave so gloomy a tinge to his view of life that he felt inclined to pronounce the whole scheme of human life a joke—a bad one at that. 'Why, a man might work his powers of mind and body to the extremity of endurance, to reach a well-defined goal, where happiness sat enthroned, and then—when he got there—his

powers of enjoyment might desert him, or malign occurrences dash the cup from his lips, and the apples of the garden of the Hesperides turn to ashes in his mouth! Why then should mortal man seek to raise himself above the beasts that perish? "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."' *Vanitas vanitatum* was the verdict with which he concluded this series of enlivening reflections, when a voice which always had power to charm away the demons of despondency fell on his ears.

'Well, my dear Arnold, what are you looking so serious about? Have you remembered that we are to meet the Liddesdales at luncheon and go with them to Aintree? We have settled to see the great race run, and perhaps the boys will be able to get away and meet us on the course. The girls are so excited about it that their appetites will suffer. There's an Australian horse in it, or a New Zealander, or something—at any rate an Antipodean, more properly still an Australasian. So we must all back him for the sake of our national honour. What a splendid thing it will be if he wins!'

'Afraid he hasn't much chance, my dear! The jumps are not high enough—or stiff enough—for a horse used to three-railed fences. Didn't some one describe the Grand National as a flat race with a good many low fences in it? Four miles and a half, a trifle over, they say. It wants a fast horse, a thoroughbred and a good stayer. I've always held that we—I speak of the South generally—should win it and the Derby some day.

And so we shall, but there's a difficulty about the age that complicates the latter race. However, that can be got over, I suppose, in time; but I don't feel in racing trim, somehow.'

'Oh, nonsense, my dear! you mustn't get into low spirits now we've got everything we ever wished for, and more besides. It looks like the pilot that weathered the storm breaking up after the ship is safe in harbour. Come along and see the girls' new dresses. They're in such good taste, and yet "quite excellent" as to fashion and fit.'

The London season! How often had the words fallen on the ears of the Australian family! What a world of meaning it conveyed to the juvenile section! Vast, mysterious, splendid—the acme of enjoyment—the *ne plus ultra* of fashion. The pinnacle of perfection in all things desirable, with boundless riches as a substratum, solid, unquestioned, supreme among the nations, what power was like England? And here they were, actually living and breathing in her metropolis—the world's metropolis, as they had often heard it called. After London there was nothing more to see—nothing more to learn. There were orders of nobility on the continent of Europe—Counts and Princes, Barons and Grafs, in profusion—but what were they to the nobility of England, where only the eldest son was heir to the ancestral title? Not cheapened, as abroad, by the law which gave the rank to every child of the house and to every child of *their* children—thus multiplying titles, which having little or no means

upon which to support the dignity, brought contempt upon the order and the race. Day by day as they rode or strolled in the parks they saw magnificent equipages, unsurpassed for beauty and uniformity—such as no other capital could supply —such horses, such carriages! — such equipages generally—as struck them with surprise and admiration. And the number and quality of them! As the sands of the sea — innumerable. They never seemed to come to an end. The private carriages were overpowering enough in all conscience, but by the Four-in-Hand Club—the Coaching Club—on the days of the annual processions, were they wonder-stricken, speechless! Such teams, with such action—in such condition! such coachmen—such footmen—beyond all conception of matching, all imagination of fashion and completeness!

Of course they had not been long in town before they were taken to the theatres and opera houses, where certain performances were in full vogue and acceptation. Here they were entranced by the perfection of the impersonations, the splendour of the staging, the pathos and the majesty of the finest vocal talent of the world, supported by the grandest instrumental harmony. Of this last consummation an Australian compatriot, born and reared to womanhood in a southern metropolis, was a *prima donna assoluta* during that memorable season.

Heroes too, naval and military, passed in review, in park or street, before these young people. They were evidently desirous to store their minds

with the exact presentment of the demigods of the race, 'in their habit' as they lived, for retrospective meditation. Kitchener was in the Soudan again, but they had sight and heard speech of Lord Roberts—Roberts of Kandahar!

> 'Then we put the lances down,
> Then the bugles blew, as we rode to Kandahar,
> Marching two and two,'

quoted Vanda. He was mounted, looking a horseman and a soldier, every inch of him, from plume to spur—carried by a lovely charger, but *not* on the historical Arab. Much they grieved that Volonel the beauteous, the high-born, the beloved, had passed away to the land of the 'Great Dead.'

'Do you believe,' queried Vanda, 'that the dear horses we have all known, and loved and mourned, are denied a future life, when so many of our rubbishy fellow-creatures, idle, criminal and despicable in every sense, are to be pardoned and promoted? I hardly can. It seems inconsistent with the scheme of eternal justice.'

'It is a large question,' replied Reggie, 'and besides, my dear Vanda, you are not old enough to argue on debatable points of doctrine. It is hardly edifying at your age.'

Of course there had been a great meeting with 'the boys,' by which endearing term the Cambridge students were known in the family. They did not lose much time, it may be believed, before presenting themselves at the Hotel Cecil, in which palace a telegram from Paris notified that the family had taken apartments. They were received

with acclamation, and their growth in 'wisdom and stature' was favourably remarked upon by Hermione and Vanda. Certainly they were good specimens of the Anglo-Saxon youth of the day, whether reared in Great or Greater Britain. Tall, well proportioned, athletic, well dressed, and showing 'good form,' which means so many indefinable qualities and habitudes, it may be imagined with what pride and joy their parents gazed on them, and how, from very joy and thankfulness, their mother's eyes overflowed as her loving arms embraced her first-born and his brother. Their father's short but fervent greeting was not effusive, after the manner of Englishmen, but none the less heartfelt and secretly joyful. As such, fully understood by the sons of the house.

Then followed, of course, unlimited talk, with explanations, reminiscences, expectations, descriptions, sketches of functions impending or otherwise, with interjections by the girls—occasionally repressed but indulgently allowed, even when not strictly in order, on account of the exuberant happiness, even transports of the present meeting. None could deny that. They were a pair of youngsters of whom any family might have been proud. Their looks were in their favour certainly. Reginald, the elder, with dark brown hair and eyes, regular features, and a figure which united grace and symmetry in equal proportions, was generally held to be handsome—and supposed to be clever. An ardent and successful student, he had distinguished himself at his college; in the Union he was looked upon as a promising, even

brilliant debater. Already he was attracted by the prospect of a legislative career, and while connecting himself for the present with the Liberals, was conscious of a leaning to Conservative principles, and a belief that with age, experience, and ripened judgment he might be found in the ranks of that great party which, while recognising and, in proper time and place, advocating reasonable progress, regarded as above all things the honour, the safety, the durability of the Empire.

The brothers, as happens usually in families, differed in a marked degree from each other, not less in physical than in mental attributes, while both were well up to the standard of strength and activity demanded of well-born, well-educated Englishmen in their college days.

Eric, the younger, less studious than his senior, had taken a leading part in the open-air contests of strength and skill which absorb so large a portion of the leisure of British University men. At cricket, football, 'the gloves,' he was—if not *facile princeps*—always among the half-dozen from whom were picked the champions of their respective colleges, in the annual or occasional contests. Each had, of course, staunch backers and enthusiastic supporters, who battled desperately for their inclusion in the team for international or county cricket; or, higher honour still, in the annual boat-race at Putney. Here the younger brother had scored, as he was three in the Cambridge Eight, and with another Australian was prepared to die at his oar, to uphold the men of his country and college. As this classic contest,

which was to be decided before Good Friday, was now only a few days distant, and arrangements had been already made, and invitations accepted, for places in a house-boat, it may be imagined what feelings animated the breasts of the entire family as the day of the absorbing fixture drew nigh.

On one never-to-be-forgotten day the girls and their mother were taken by the young men, proud of the privilege of escorting their handsome sisters and the stately mother, over the precincts of Cambridge. The day was fine, for a wonder—a soft sky—a gentle breeze—a day when walking was a pleasure, and the fresh, pure air a delight. 'There used to be an old stone bridge over the Cam about here,' said Reggie, 'beside which the great Benedictine Monastery of the Fern had probably something to do with the foundation of the University.'

'Where did the students live?' asked Hermione; 'in the Monastery?'

'They were lodged at first in the houses of the townspeople. The long street, hereabouts, begins with Trumpington Road, but it ends in a narrow lane, fronting Sepulchre Church. Here are, you see, the more important Colleges. The students were possibly a more or less unruly lot. At any rate, in 1231, Henry III., we are told, issued warrants "for the Regulation of Cambridge Clerks." Troublous times ensued, for in Wat Tyler's time the rabble (I beg their pardon), the labour party of the period, sacked the Colleges, but were attacked and repulsed by the young Bishop of Norwich.'

'So bishops used to fight in those days?'

'Yes, under stress of circumstances—there were several instances—Bishop Odo was another priest militant. The rebellion did not last long, fortunately; but Jack Cade only foreshadowed the utterances of some of our latter-day legislators when he swore that his horse should be put to grass in Cheapside.'

'We should not like George and Pitt Streets to revert to kangaroo grass again,' said Vanda, who was highly conservative, 'but worse things have happened when the people got the upper hand.'

'Let us hope that reasonable counsels will prevail,' said Mrs. Banneret; 'in the meanwhile, suppose we explore this beautiful building. What is it called?'

'This is the famous Fitzwilliam Museum,' answered Reggie, 'to which the Earl of that name bequeathed a picture gallery, a valuable library, with 120 volumes of engravings, and a hundred thousand pounds.'

'A princely gift. Is this the Sculpture Gallery? How superb these marbles are, and what lovely Greek vases!'

'The building seems worthy of its contents,' said Hermione. 'What a glorious façade! The portico and colonnades are worth a day's study. If we lived near I should spend hours and hours here.'

'We haven't half time enough for it to-day,' said Eric; 'there are still the Ellison Pictures, the Botanic Gardens, and the Mesmer Collection to

see. It will take us till lunch time to look over the Colleges.'

'Are there many?' asked Vanda.

'Ever so many. Here is Trinity to lead off with; the largest collegiate foundation in Europe, learned people say. The Masters' Court was built at the expense of Doctor Whewell. You can see his cipher, the "W.W."'

'"How reverend is the face of this tall pile,"' quoted Hermione; 'it quite awes one. The grand architecture—the wondrous antiquity. No one can sneer at these halls of learning.'

'St. John's College,' said Eric ruthlessly, passing on, 'is the second largest. Has splendid restorations, I beg to observe. We needn't wait longer than to verify the armorial bearings of the foundress of this and Christ's College on that massive gateway.'

'Let me look,' said Vanda; 'who was she?'

'Margaret, Countess of Richmond, and mother of Henry VII. King's College was endowed and founded by Henry VI. in connection with Eton.'

'I recollect,' continued Vanda—'"her Henry's holy shade."'

'The Chapel,' said Reggie, 'is said to be an unequalled example of the Perpendicular order of Gothic architecture, whatever that may be. This fretted roof is not supported by a single pillar. It is vaulted in twelve divisions. Each keystone weighs more than a ton.'

Before the day finished they had a modest lunch, where the famous Trumpington ale was partaken of by the whole party as *de rigueur* and

a part of the performance. They saw the Roman ruins at Grandchester, and mused over Byron's pool. The visit to Girton College was reserved for another day. At Stourbridge, the girls shuddered at the sight of a disused chapel of an ancient edifice said to have been an hospital for lepers.

'Lepers here!' exclaimed Vanda; 'I didn't know that there ever were lepers in England.'

'They were common enough, not only in Britain but throughout the continent of Europe in the Middle Ages,' explained Reggie; 'they had to carry bells and give warning as they walked, were forbidden to enter towns and villages, and so on.'

'How dreadful! What a comfort that we don't live among such horrors. That was what Nurse Lilburne's husband was supposed to have been torn away from her and shut up, on that dreadful island, for — only on suspicion too! Where are we now, Eric?'

'This is Madingley, where the King, as Prince of Wales, lived when he was at Cambridge. Gray's "Elegy" was written there, it is supposed.'

'Oh, how delightful! I wonder if they made his Royal Highness learn it by heart, like all of us.

'The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea, etc.

"Lea" means "meadow" in English, doesn't it? "River flat" in early Australian, like "mob" for "drove," "paddock" for "field," "rise" for "hill," and so on.'

All necessary arrangements had been carefully made long before the great day — the Carnival of the Thames. What hopes and expecta-

tions had been careering through the minds of the young people during the preceding period! Visions of a lovely spring day, when the riverside region would be glorified with budding willow, oak and elm, lime and chestnut; where the nightingales at eve would sing a pæan for the victors—Cambridge, of course; for were there not two Australians in their boat—the Banneret boat? a circumstance unique in the University river-history. Then, again, depression, deepening to despair, as the weather prophets and the cloudy skies foretold evil,—a drizzle, if not a down-pour. In such case what was to become of the lovely boating suits, the hats, the dresses, the parasols, bewitching, irresistible?—soaked, muddied, limp. The girls dismal and unattractive; the boys—the men—wretched and cross—or worse, reckless and disgusted. The picture was intolerable.

'I shall drown myself,' said Vanda—when for the twentieth time the subject was discussed at breakfast—'I know I shall, if our boat doesn't win, and be fished up from the oozy Thames by some "waterside character," or jump overboard in the intoxication of victory. Either way I shall hardly survive the event—I——'

'Here comes mother!' interposed Hermione, who, naturally, as became the elder sister, was less impulsive and demonstrative; 'perhaps she will think it better that you should stay at home, rather than display the *Bride from the Bush* characteristics before an English audience.'

'Oh, that hateful novel! Thanks, sister dear! You have hit upon the true corrective. I promise

to be "splendidly, icily null," rather than give myself away to the sneering English of the period. Oh, mother, *do* you think it will rain? Whatever shall we do?'

'Who was talking about suicide, just now? I thought I caught a word or two of nonsensical threats, as I was nearing the door. If I thought daughters of mine——'

'Oh, darling mother, don't go on! I know what you are going to say,' entreated the penitent girl; 'it was only my nonsense. Why, Eric said the other day that two of the men in the Oxford crew had resolved in the case of defeat to study for the Church and go in for slum curacies.'

'I never doubted that young men as well as young women could talk nonsense,' conceded Mrs. Arnold, with benevolent candour; 'but in the meantime suppose we wait a little longer before we go into heroics about the weather, which we cannot alter or defy.'

'I second the motion,' said Mr. Banneret, who at that moment entered the room with the *Times* in his hand. 'I don't like to hear the question of the weather discussed flippantly. It is too serious a subject. I have known more than one case where a poor fellow committed suicide because it *didn't rain*. It meant ruin to him: the loss of twenty years' work and self-denial. So there was some sort of excuse. But complaints and cheap wit about so grave a subject are out of place. I believe that the day will be fine after all. We shall see.'

'Then I will promise and vow to be good for a

month,' said Hermione. 'Vanda will not compare old and new countries in mixed society; Reggie will not wear his superior English manner; and Eric will read steadily for his degree, even if he has to be an Australian squatter.'

'I suppose I ought to take one for the credit of my native land,' said Eric, 'but I am going to be a colonist whatever happens. I've no notion of loafing about in England. There are too many of that sort here already. There's a trying season coming, unless I mistake the signs of the times—industrial warfare as well as the other thing. And I mean to be in the thick of it.'

'And so will I,' said Reggie, 'as soon as I get my double first. I'm going in for Australian politics.'

'What good will it be to you out there?' said Eric.

'That's my business, but I can't think that an all-round University training can unfit a man for any career, at home or abroad. There may be a temporary prejudice; but if a man shapes his course sensibly, he is bound to be of more weight, even in a democratic assembly, with such an addition to his intelligence, than without. Look at William Charles Wentworth—Dalley—John Lang, and others. The two first were the darlings of the people (Dalley an Imperial Privy Councillor), and always exercised immense political power. Lang was acknowledged to be a brilliant linguist and successful barrister in India. Sir James Martin, too, though without University training, was a man of such phenomenal and comprehensive

intellect, that he was independent of it. He filled the highest political and legal positions with unexampled success. His last act as Chief Justice of New South Wales proved, strange to say, posthumously successful. An important and complicated mining case was heard before the Full Court, composed of Sir James and two Judges, during his last illness. It was given in favour of the complainants by a majority of the Justices, Sir James dissenting. He left his reasons, stated in writing. The defendants appealed to the Privy Council. Some delay occurred. In the meantime Sir James, who had been for some time ailing, died. The decision of the Privy Council came out shortly after. It was in favour of the appellants, thus upholding, even from the grave, the soundness of the dead Judge's opinion and legal knowledge.'

The day before the great boat-race of the year was doubtful. *The* day was, however, altogether charming and delicious. The wind of yesterday had died down. The few soft, fleecy clouds that flecked the sky, the fair blue firmament of the last week in March, had almost, of course not wholly, disappeared, as they would have done in Australia. Still it was a delicious day. Even Vanda admitted this, though prone to disparage the old land in comparison with the new. They were all suitably attired and ready to start directly after an early breakfast. The girls' boating costumes, as each had promised to accept a passage in a club-boat, rowed by an ardent admirer, left nothing to be desired. Such hats, such skirts, such parasols, and,

of course, the Cambridge colours! They had had some practice in a four-oar in Sydney Harbour since they had come to live on the shores of that peerless waterway. So they considered themselves judges of the art and science of rowing, and were disposed to be critical and competent spectators. Their patriotic feelings were deeply stirred, for were there not two, really two, colonials in the Cambridge crew—a circumstance almost unparalleled in the annals of University racing. Of course they knew that the Diamond Sculls had been won by Mr. Ronaldson, of Western Victoria, and twenty-five years after by his son, of the South African Mounted Infantry, both Australian born. This they knew, for he was a neighbour of theirs, and they had seen the sculls in the library at 'The Peak.' They knew, too, that for years past there had been no 'Varsity boat-race without an Australian in one or other, generally in both, of the contesting boats. Still, 'You never can tell till the colours are up,' is a racing adage as well on water as on land. They knew how true, in the great races they had watched at Randwick and Flemington, and their gentle bosoms fluttered each time when the heartshaking thought would intrude that it *might* be their hard lot to see the shadow of Barnes Bridge fleet over the Oxford boat a few seconds before it crossed that of Cambridge. They had experienced such disappointments in their lives—had seen Tarcoola, a Lower Darling outsider, win the Melbourne Cup, when the family money—not very much, for Mr. Banneret discouraged gambling in all forms, but what Vanda

called 'their hard-earned savings,' put together in shillings, sixpences, and even threepenny bits—was on Toreador.

This malign stroke of fortune they had borne and survived. But the personal element was so intermingled with *this* event that if it did not come off, the future was dark indeed.

They kept their race-glasses fixed on the boats as the men were getting in. How handsome Eric looked, and how proud they were of him! An inch or two over six feet in height, yet not looking it from the perfect symmetry of his figure, effectively displayed by the boating costume, many a girl's heart went out to him besides those of his adoring sisters, and many a fervent wish, not to say prayer, ascended as the Cambridge boat, wildly cheered, tore out and took her place by Putney Bridge. Then Oxford followed, amidst shouts that shook the air, rowing, for her, a quicker stroke than usual. If she can keep it up, what price Cambridge? The thought was maddening, and the girls' faces began to look gravely anxious.

On the river's banks a human hive seems to have settled. Black are the bridges, the lawns, the balconies, and the windows. The crowded steamers must be dangerously o'erladen; and surely the protagonists, in this grand trial of skill, strength, and endurance, will task every sinew, muscle, limb, and heart-valve to win the laurel crown of the year. The English crews fight for their College, their Alma Mater; but the Australians are for their respective Colonies, *their* native land: to show, as they have done in other

historic rivalry, that the sons of Greater Britain are on a level in this as in other respects with their relatives from the wondrous isles from which their fathers came. 'I ride for my county,' quoth Valentine Maher. In much the same sense as the West of Ireland member of 'The Blazers' rode, the colonial champions in the Cambridge boat may each have vowed, as they stretched each manly thew and sinew, to do a man's best for the good land for which their fathers had toiled and striven and fought in the long-past years; with droughts and fires, blacks, bushrangers, and other foes of the pioneer—resulting, alas! not seldom, in total wreck and financial ruin after the work of a life's best years.

However, these are not holiday thoughts. The present is sunlit and joyous; let us enjoy it while we may. There is a temporary cessation of the murmurous, confused, unintelligible growl of the crowds. The course is clear. The boats are off —*off*! The race has begun. So has the true excitement, the desperate struggle of the swarming crowds on the swaying steamers and the towing path.

'Oh! which is in front?' cries Vanda. 'Don't say it is Oxford, or I can never survive this day.'

'Don't be a goose,' says Reggie magisterially. 'Watch Hammersmith Bridge. There—I thought as much—Cambridge is ahead.'

'Hurrah!' called out Hermione, who up to this point had been discreet and decorous. 'Oh, I beg pardon! but the strain was too great. Look

at that girl, with the Oxford colours and a pink parasol—how she is waving it about. They hadn't parasols, I suppose, in those days, or I'm sure Rowena would have waved hers at Ashby-de-la-Zouche, when Ivanhoe's lance sent the Templar rolling in the lists. That was an exciting affair, if you like. How I should have liked to have been there!'

'Hermione,' said her mother, 'we shall have to leave you at home next time if you cannot control your feelings; you are doing your country an injustice by your want of *retenue*.'

'Look out for Barnes,' said Reggie, in low, vibrating tones, as of one who had no time for trifling. 'By Jove! Cambridge has put up a spurt and drawn level. How they're shouting on the bridge. Cambridge! Cambridge! The light blue for ever! Cambridge wins!'

It is even so. Cambridge leaves rowing, and one—two—three—four seconds pass before Oxford finishes. The great race is over for the year. Eric and his crew are on the wharf before the Ship Inn, at Mortlake. Happy heroes—'o'er a' the ills o' life victorious.' Victors in a world-famed contest. The news flashed within a few minutes to all the centres of the old world and the new. It is not, 'What will they say in England?' although that is of as much or more engrossing interest to the colonist as to the home-born Briton; but also, 'What will they say in Sydney and Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart, Brisbane and Perth—ay, in distant Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie?' In every one of these aggregations of

people and commerce, where divers nations are represented and various tongues are spoken, there will be a knot of watchers at the telegraph offices to know if the news of the great race has 'come through,' and many a wager will be won and lost as each man of sporting tastes and traditions has backed his fancy, whether with the dark blue or the light. There will be healths drunk in far-off lands to-night, and to-night recollections of the Trumpington ale, of walks along 'the Backs,' where the Cam 'wanders through frequent arches, with groves and gardens of unique beauty,' will recur to grizzled graduates of Cambridge and Oxford.

This great and crowning mercy having been vouchsafed to them, by which the Bannerets, young and old, would for evermore hold themselves to be indissolubly linked with the Cambridge victory, the family had leisure to consider what should be their next inroad into sport amid fashionable surroundings. Hermione and Vanda had enjoyed the ecstatic pleasure of being rowed on the broad expanse of Father Thames; had also been congratulated by the men of their brothers' college on Eric's noble performance, which (they said) had materially aided in the glorious victory. These Austral maidens had thereupon come to the conclusion that nothing in the world came up to the accessories and environments amid which the nobler sports were transacted in England. They wondered what would be the next open-air entertainment at which they would be likely to assist, and as the weather, for a wonder, was becoming

finer every day, *almost* rivalling the glorious sunshine of their native land, some one threw out a suggestion about the Liverpool Grand National Steeplechase, to come off on the 25th—next week, indeed—at Aintree.

CHAPTER XII

'I SEE that the Liverpool Grand National Steeplechase is to come off at Aintree on the 25th of March,' Mrs. Banneret had said, at breakfast, one morning. 'Your father has decided to take us to that great race, which I feel certain we shall all enjoy. Even I must renew my youth, and recall the days when I used to ride—actually *ride* to the country race-meeting held at Appin, near Barham Court, our old home in New South Wales. My eldest brother always rode in the principal steeplechase. And what tremendous excitement there was when he won!'

'How delightful!' said Vanda. 'What was the name of the dear horse?'

'I remember it well,' said the matron, her eye kindling and her clear cheek flushing with the memories of a bygone day. 'It was Slasher; he was bred in the family, and trained by my brother himself. The Governor's wife walked up to the Judge's box, and patted his neck. She congratulated Val—who had just received a commission in the 50th Regiment, known to be under orders for India.

'"You have my best wishes, Mr. Bournefield,

and I feel confident that you will always be in the forefront of the battle, as you have been to-day—I wish you every success in life!" Val bowed low, and said he hoped to do honour to her ladyship's good opinion. So he did, poor fellow! That is his portrait which hangs in my bedroom.'

'What! the one with all the medals and clasps—such a handsome, soldierly-looking man. Why, his hair is grey!'

'Yes, he was Colonel Bournefield when he was killed, shot through the heart, waving his sword, and leading his men on in the Sikh War. He was only twenty when he won that race.'

'Was he handsome, mother?'

'It was thought so. A very nice-looking boy, with blue eyes and curly fair hair—full of mischief, and afraid of nothing in the world. Poor Val! How he would have enjoyed coming with us to-day!'

'Isn't it fortunate that there is an Australasian horse in the race?' said Hermione. 'I wonder if he has a chance of winning—I must back him in gloves, if nothing else. What is his name?'

'Moifaa, a New Zealand name; he comes from there, and has won steeplechases in his own island. What did Eric and Reggie say about him?'

'They went to see him in his stable, and liked him ever so much—a fine horse, nearly or quite thorough-bred, with immense power, and a fair

amount of speed. They were going to back him for a moderate amount.'

'Then I vote we do likewise,' said Hermione, 'always supposing father approves. It will give us so much more interest in the race. . Delightful, won't it be, if we can pay our expenses, and have all the fun and excitement to the good?'

'Do you agree, mother?'

'We must see what your father says—I daresay he and Eric will look him well over. Then we may invest with confidence.'

'Really,' said Vanda, 'one would think that all these charming "fixtures" had been arranged specially for our benefit. I never heard of so many, more or less mixed up with Australians. It's quite flattering to our vanity, of which we are supposed to have our share!'

'Not more than English people,' said Hermione; 'the difference is, that we talk more when we win anything, because it is a pleasant surprise, having been brought up to believe that the British article is in every department superior. The Englishman disdains to dwell upon the fact, because his unquestioned excellence in art, science, sport, and fashion must be (he supposes) admitted by the whole civilised world!'

'That's what makes him hated abroad, I suppose?'

'Often unjustly, I have thought,' interposed Mrs. Banneret. 'His quiet manner is translated into supercilious pride, as also his distrust of casual acquaintances, who may be, and indeed often are, undesirable. Our Australian habit is

quite the reverse, and, as I have more than once warned you, my dear girls, not always free from disagreeable developments.'

'Yes, indeed!' said Vanda; 'you remember that delightful Sicilian Count, who turned out to be a cardsharper, or something worse?'

The day of the great steeplechase at length arrived. It did not rain, though it was cold and bleak. It was snowing in Lancashire—so they heard, but Aintree was dry. However, the Australians were more curious than alarmed about such a phenomenon. Besides, it gave the girls an excuse for wearing their furs, which were of the first quality. The next obvious duty was to scrutinise the competing horses as they came out in procession. 'Here is the King's horse, Ambush II.; he has been made first favourite,' said Eric. 'He won this race in 1900. Isn't he a grand animal, and in the very pink of condition—goes out at 7 to 1. Now, girls, look! Here's the King himself! come on purpose for us Cornstalks to see him. Ambush II. is being saddled. His Majesty pats his neck, and shakes hands with his jock, the well-known Anthony—wishes him good luck, of course. Isn't that worth coming all the way from Australia to see?'

'Very nearly!' said Vanda, who was eagerly taking in every detail of this truly astonishing performance. 'Do you think he will win?'

'There's no saying,' replied her brother guardedly; 'he did win this race, and so did Manifesto. But they say the stewards have raised the leaps, or made them stiffer, this year.

There is a bit of a row about it. That gives the Maori horse a better chance.'

'Why?'

'Because the jumps in Australia and New Zealand are notoriously the biggest and stiffest in the racing world. So the horse that can "negotiate them with ease to himself and satisfaction to the lookers-on," need not fear Aintree, or any course under the sky.'

'But didn't some gentleman say he considered the course absolutely unfair?'

'Very likely; but others who had ridden and trained horses at Aintree saw nothing to complain of.'

'How many starters are there?'

'Twenty-six. What a splendid-looking lot they are!'

'Oh! here comes Reggie! Who is that with him, Eric? He looks nice.'

'He's a Cambridge chum—same college, and a wonderfully good chap. A great hunting man in his own county. He's always wanting us to go and stay with him at Castle Blake, where there's no end of shooting and fishing. We're going some day, when we can get away. They're coming now, and Reggie will introduce him.'

At this moment the two young men came up. The stranger was a handsome young fellow with blue eyes of a daring and romantic character, and that expression of *abandon* so characteristic of every man of every class hailing from the Green Isle—when out for a holiday.

'Permit me to present my friend and college chum, Mr. Manus Beresford Blake, of Castle Blake, in the historic county of Galway. He's making believe to study for the Church, though whether he follows up the profession after he's taken his degree, I make bold to doubt. In the meantime, he's coming to lunch with us, and will explain all about this race, as I believe he knows every race-horse and steeplechaser in Ireland.'

'So much the better for us, my dear Reggie,' said Mrs. Banneret, 'for we know scarcely anything, and I feel sure the girls are dying to get reliable information.'

'Here's the very man! Manus, my boy! behold two young ladies whose minds you can store with every kind of useful knowledge about the noble animal. Only don't be led into thinking that they are wholly ignorant of horse- and hound-lore, though they do come from a far country.'

'I shall wait until our further acquaintance before I presume to add to the Miss Bannerets' library of useful knowledge. I presume that they are accustomed to your vein of humour. Any hints which my acquaintance with so many honest horses, *not* quite so honest owners, enables me to give, I shall be proud to offer.'

'You and Eric have been round the horses, Mr. Blake, I gather,' said Hermione. 'What do you think of our champion, the New Zealander?'

'Moorfowl, is it? for that's what I heard a bookmaker call him. A fine horse, there's no

denying it, but I hardly think—I doubt, that is, whether he's thorough-bred.'

'Oh, of course,' broke in Vanda, 'he's a colonial horse, and therefore *can't* be good enough to win against an English field! Poor Moifaa! You'll see directly'; and the girl's eyes sparkled, the colour came to her cheek, as she raised her head defiantly, as if to dare the world in arms to disparage the steeds of the South.

'I didn't gather that my friend's family came from Ireland,' replied Mr. Blake, with a smile half of challenge, half of admiration, as he gazed at the eager damsel, whose ardent championship heightened her beauty so dangerously. 'But I seem to be accused of British prejudice before I have had time to assert an opinion of any kind or description. I merely indicated a doubt, and got no farther, when Miss Vanda swept me away from my position, before I had time to take one. That's a truly Irish statement, isn't it?'

Here all the young people laughed, and Mrs. Banneret gently reproved the too fervent advocacy of her younger daughter, hoping Mr. Blake would excuse her on the score of her recent arrival from a far country.

That young lady, however, declined to be excused on the ground of being a savage (so to speak), though she owned that she could not tamely suffer Moifaa to be depreciated, as it seemed to her, solely on the ground of his being born outside their sacred England. However, she apologised, and hoped Mr. Blake would overlook it, on the ground of her youth and inexperience.

'My dear young lady, I'll overlook *anything* you are pleased to say! I take it as the highest compliment to contradict me, any time you feel in want of a new sensation. And now, shall I say what I think of this fine upstanding horse from the South?'

'Oh, by all means!'

'Then, remember, we start fair. He's a grand-looking horse—would be just the sort to carry my father, who's sixteen stone, over the Galway stone walls — but I'm doubtful — no, I'll say, apprehensive—that he's "too big to get the course," as they say here. Seventeen hands is a big horse, though his make and shape are almost perfect, I'll allow, and finer shoulders I never saw. And so we'll know more after the race—I'll have something to say then.'

'Oh, here comes my father! He was detained in London about matters of business.'

Mr. Banneret had met Mr. Blake at his son's rooms at Cambridge, so there was no need of an introduction. He had excellent news from Pilot Mount, which enabled him to join the family party with even higher expectations of enjoyment than he had anticipated.

He brought with him a New Zealand friend, whose successes in land investment had placed him in a position to indulge himself with what he called a 'run home' every three or four years. Mr. Allan Maclean was a typical Highlander of the dark-haired, swarthy type, middle-sized, but broad-shouldered, and sinewy of frame, giving promise of exceptional strength. He had emigrated to the

land of the Moa and the Maori when a mere boy, had worked hard, and formed so shrewd an outlook as to the progress of the young colony, that he was now not only independent, but likely to be, within a few years, one of the richest men in the South Island.

'I suppose this is an interesting race to you, Maclean?'

'Decidedly so—in fact I came home a month earlier chiefly to see it run. Glendon Spencer is a great friend of mine, and I knew not only Moifaa, but his dam, Denbigh—a magnificent animal, and a winner of steeplechases in her day—not unimportant ones either.'

'I heard that you backed him heavily.'

'Well, fairly so. I took thirty to one, in hundreds, from Joe Johnson. Being early in the market, I got a shade more of the odds. I am not a betting man, generally; but in this case I felt confident, and stood to lose a trifle, or win enough to pay my travelling expenses, and something over.'

'You colonists are a demoralising lot, it must be admitted. Fancy the example to me dear friend Reggie Banneret, and his brother—poor innocent Eric! Think of it now! rushing over the South Pacific to see a race run, and within a few months clearing back again, with £3000 in your pocket.'

'If the old horse stands up. It's rather a big "*if*," isn't it? But I'll trust my luck this time. It's not the first time I've backed him. I saw him win the Great Northern Steeplechase in Auckland,

three miles and a half, with eleven stone twelve up, as well as the Hawkes Bay Hurdle Race, carrying twelve stone. He was taken to England, with the idea of winning this race; and I believe he *will* win it. Isn't that the bell? What a string, to be sure! Twenty-six coloured for the race. What horses—what people—what a sight! Old England for ever! God save the King! Here comes His Majesty's Ambush II. looking his very best, and Anthony, no less, the proudest jock in Britain this day.'

Here they all start for the preliminary canter—what a cheer from the assembled thousands! Now they are paraded. No time lost at the start. They are off—off! A deep, wordless hum succeeds, like the surge voice of a lately aroused ocean, still reminiscent of storm and tempest, though now the wave and wind be still. 'Look! Pride of Maberton, Loch Lomond, and Inquisitor are away, followed by Railoff, who falls at the first fence. Ambush II. is down at the next.' Alas! The girls are so sorry—not that they wished him to win, but to have been among the gallant few that fought it out to the end. Deerslayer goes on from The Gunner, and Loch Lomond, and half a dozen others, amongst whom, going steadily, are Moifaa, Detail, and Manifesto.

Deerslayer continues to lead over Valentine's Brook, the next to come down is May King, after which Honeymoon and Old Town fail to clear the dry ditch. Now the excitement becomes intense!

'Oh, look!' cries Vanda, 'at Moifaa. How he is coming up! Well done the Maori! Aké—

Aké—Aké! He has passed Deerslayer—The Gunner and Kirkland are next, with Nahilla, and a lot of others behind. Look at that gallant old Manifesto! How easily he takes his jumps!'

'Becker's Brook—doesn't Nimrod mention it somewhere?' said Hermione. 'Oh, poor Deerslayer is down!—the slayer among the slain. Fortune of war.'

'Now, Moifaa,' shouts Allan Maclean, 'it's time for you to test your "mana." Death or glory! He's going strong; Kirkland and The Gunner also. Ambush II., enjoying himself without a rider, keeps well up, but cannoning into Detail—turns him into "another detail" (*pace* Mr. Kipling). There is a fall in the dry ditch. Benvenir breaks down. Loch Lomond breaks his neck. Moifaa draws clear of Kirkland and The Gunner on the flat, and, striding along, beats Mr. Bibby's Kirkland by *eight* lengths; The Gunner a neck behind *him*.'

'Who was fourth horse?'

'Shaun Aboo—Robin Hood fifth. Poor dear old Manifesto last!' concluded Vanda. "And that's how the favourite was beat," as Gordon sings.'

. . . . . .

The great race is over. Nothing more until next year. The winners retire to count up their gains, the losers to calculate how they may liquidate. This last is a more serious affair. As Moifaa was led in towards the weighing-stand, a burst of applause greeted horse and rider. There were very few of the cheering company who had not

lost upon him, but a British crowd is chiefly just, and upholds a fair field and no favour.

With regard to the performance, to quote an eminent sporting authority, 'no finer exhibition of jumping ability has ever been seen at Aintree than that afforded by the New Zealand horse. He seemed to go half a foot higher than anything else in the field, and to land in the most collected manner. For the last mile it looked like a match between Moifaa, Kirkland, and The Gunner. But when once on the race-course, any one could see that Moifaa was a certain winner if he stood up.'

The muster of colonials was alarming. Was there going to be another Boer War? Indeed, had occasion arisen, a formidable contingent could have been recruited there and then. North and south, and east and west—the bronzed, desert-worn, weather-beaten Sons of Empire turned up in the paddock, never so crowded before. Men were shaking hands enthusiastically who had last met in Sydney or Melbourne—Perth or Brisbane—Calcutta, Peshawur, Nigeria, or New South Wales—the back blocks of Queensland or the northern territory of West Australia, where the pearling luggers with their Malay crews make high festival when the 'shell takes' are good.

How far, how widely, the roving Englishman wandered in his quest for fame or fortune, was abundantly demonstrated by the number and quality of the 'Legion that never was listed,' on that auspicious day. Such companies and troops—rank upon rank, as they closed round the

champion of the day—the first Australasian horse that had ever won against Britain's best 'chasers,' in the classic race of world-wide fame that had no fellow in the contests of horse and man since the world began.

CHAPTER XIII

Mrs. Banneret, recalling her Flemington experiences on Cup Day, had arranged for a symposium on a novel and comprehensive scale—to take place after the great event of the day. Notwithstanding the widely differing conditions of the respective race-courses, she determined, with the co-operation of her husband and sons, to have something like a representative Australian function, worthy of her country's hospitable customs and of this truly memorable occasion.

Having persuaded several of their most intimate friends to have their carriages standing fairly close to each other, a sort of 'corral' was arranged, within which a clear space was left free.

This gave room for tressels, upon which were placed temporary tables, rather long and narrow, but capable of holding such meats, wines, and other refreshments as are usually dispensed at races. Of course some diplomatic management was necessary to carry through an innovation foreign to the traditionary, time-honoured habitudes of English race-goers. With the help of a few extra police (the Inspector had been in Australia) and a

small army of waiters, supplied by the caterer, a reasonable compromise was arrived at. A calculation was made, by which it could be demonstrated that if even a third more than the number of expected guests arrived, they could be supplied with seats and a liberal supply of the delicacies of the season, together with a few glasses of 'Dry Monopole,' or, having regard to the lower temperature of Britain, with a 'touch of the real Mackay.'

It was well that the calculation did not fail on the elastic side; for when it leaked out that Arnold Banneret, sometime of Carjagong, New South Wales, and more recently of Pilot Mount, West Australia, was entertaining his friends, had won largely, indeed, on the victory of Moifaa, it was wonderful what a number of colonists turned up. Among them were Lord Newstead and his lovely wife, the latter in her priceless Russian sables, and otherwise appropriately adorned. She was so glad to meet her husband's kind, good friends, whose chance meeting with Percy and poor dear Southwater had been so fortunate for both. She hoped that Mr. and Mrs. Banneret and the girls would pay her a visit at Newstead. As for Mr. Reginald and Mr. Eric, if they could spare the time, they would know—young men being so scarce just now—how welcome they would be at her country house, or, indeed, any other. She believed she would really take a run over to that delightful Golden West some day—where, apparently, the precious metal was lying about in heaps, waiting to be picked up.

'Not quite so easy a game as that,' said his

Lordship—'eh, Mr. Banneret? Little accidents like fever, "robbery under arms," hunger and thirst, intervene sometimes *before* the discovery of Tom Tiddler's Ground, or Pilot Mount. We both had a look-in from the fever fiend—a "close call," too, as our Yankee friends say—and but for that tender nursing—why, bless my soul! you don't say? —it can't be! Well, of all the people in the world who'd have ever thought of seeing *you* here!' and upon this excited exclamation, Percy, Lord Newstead, rushed forward, and accosting a pair of rather distinguished-looking persons, seized the lady by the hand, and shook it effusively, somewhat to the surprise of her companion, who had evidently never seen his Lordship before. Lady Newstead, too, looked slightly curious until her husband, almost dragging the strange lady with him, said, 'My dear, allow me to introduce to you Mrs. Lilburne, who saved my life in West Australia, and to whom you owe your present possession of my unworthy self. There was *one night* on which I never thought to see England again, I assure you.'

'My dear Percy, you needn't be quite so demonstrative. Mrs. Lilburne looks almost alarmed. I quite agree with you in believing that we should never have met here but for her great care and kindness. Really, Mrs. Lilburne, I think I should have recognised you even without Percy's assistance—he has so often described you to me. But I see Mrs. Banneret is laying claim to a share of your attention; so I think we had better do honour now to the lunch, to which we were all so kindly invited. Mr.

Lilburne is wondering where *he* comes in. I see we must make common cause. I am anxious to hear some of *your* adventures, which I am told are too thrilling.'

'I should be charmed, Lady Newstead—they were rather unusual; but my wife and I have entered into a solemn compact that I am not to divulge the secrets of the prison-house. She has the copyright—if I may use the term—and to her alone belongs the right to disclose that strange passage of my life. In the meantime, we are both quite well, and more than happy. Permit me to offer to fill your glass with our mutual friends' excellent champagne, and to wish them continued health and unclouded happiness.'

Lady Newstead accepted the invitation, and they moved over to a position nearer their hostess, who, with the aid of the head of the house and the younger branches of the family, was ably discharging her manifold duties.

Just then Mr. Banneret, whose ordinarily calm manner seemed to have acquired an accession of gaiety from the influence of the scene, had been explaining to Lady Woods, who, recently arrived from Perth, had assumed her well-known character of 'the life and soul of the party,' how delighted he and his wife were to find so many old friends able to keep high festival with them this day.

'If I could (borrowing a joke from the "Goldfields Act and Regulations," which I used to know by heart) obtain a Booth License to dispense wines and spirits, I should be inclined to

call this the "Inn of Strange Meetings"—inasmuch as the number of friends and acquaintances who have "come up" from the Under World, as Tennyson hath it, is like an army with banners. Not only from the inmost deserts, but—and here' (his face changing suddenly as he spoke) 'comes one from the grave itself.'

With these words he hailed a tall man sauntering past, who, dressed in the height of the reigning race-course fashion, in no respect diverging from the canon of 'good form' in raiment or otherwise, bore yet an exceptional and striking personality.'

'Tena koe, Captain, haere mai.'

A Maori response immediately followed, as the person addressed, drawing himself up, bent a pair of stern blue eyes upon his interlocutor, while Arnold Banneret, whose expression was compounded in almost equal parts of welcome and wonder, fear and amazement, gazed anxiously upon the stranger's countenance. The new-comer was tall, considerably indeed above the height of men ordinarily thus described, though his broad chest and athletic frame caused his unusual height to be less apparent. His bronzed cheek was traversed by a scar, 'a token true of Bosworth Field,' or other engagement, where shrewd blows had been exchanged.

'Glad to see you again,' said the host. 'Waiter, bring Captain—Captain——'

'Bucklaw,' interposed the stranger guest—'been back to the old place.'

'Of course, of course, quite natural!' continued

his entertainer; 'bring Captain Bucklaw champagne.'

The glasses were not small, having been specially ordered, and as the gallant Captain drained his, he clinked glasses with his host, and, with a glance which combined an air of reckless daring with a savour of almost schoolboy mischief, he said: 'It's not necessary to say, Judge, that I'm here incog.—Captain Bucklaw, of the steamer *Haitchi Maru*, with British-owned cargo, and passenger steamer now at anchor below Gravesend, cleared from San Francisco, is not to be mistaken for the captain of the *Leonora* beneath the blue wave of Chabrat Harbour. I brought over a cargo of rice, and take back one of flour with, of course, sundries, not particularly named in the manifest. She's faster than most "tramps," and carries five guns—two of them No. 7 quick-firers.'

'And so you came to England to see a steeplechase?'

'That is so—or rather, being in England again, I thought I would have a look at the great race that everybody was talking about. Heard, too, that there was a New Zealand horse in it. You know that we Southerners are death on horse-racing. That time you and I met at Oponomi, Captain John Webster's place on the Hokianga (I bought a cargo of Kauri timber from him), I went to the race meeting at Auckland, where we were filling up with frozen lamb. I was struck then with the make and shape of horses bred at Mount Eden—saw Carbine, too. What a horse

that was! Now in England, I hear. So I backed Moifaa, like the other flax and manuka men, and made money enough almost to buy a new ship.'

'But, Captain, how is it that we see you here, or indeed anywhere else, in *the flesh*? We heard that——'

'Yes, I know—been dead nearly three years. Knocked on the head and thrown overboard by a rascally cook's mate. Dead, of course. Blue shark's meat, and so on.'

'That part is true, then?'

'Yes, I *was* stunned and thrown overboard by that scoundrel and the boatswain together. But I was not drowned—far from it. The water brought me to, and I struck out for an island that I knew in that latitude; and, fortunately, before I got near enough to the reef for the sharks to sample me, I was picked up by a canoe, with natives, crossing from one island to another.

'They took me to their village, where I lived for six months. Reported dead, of course. So I concluded to stay dead. It's not a bad thing, now and then. I was taken off by a whaler, and landed at Valparaiso to begin life afresh as Captain Bucklaw, and got a new ship when this Russo-Jap War broke out; and now stand a chance of dying an Admiral of the Japanese Fleet. But say—isn't that my passenger of the *Leonora* from Molokai to Ponapé and ports? Don Carlos Alvarez? Suppose we fire a gun across his bows, and bring him to? Who's the handsome woman he's talking to?'

'His wife—the celebrated Nurse Lilburne, of

Pilot Mount, Kalgoorlie, West Australia, who saved more lives in the typhoid fever epidemic than all the doctors on the field.'

'Is that so? Then I'm proud of having been the means of bringing her best patient back to her. Hope he'll stay *put*. The buccaneer has more than one good deed to his account; maybe the recording angel won't forget to post that one up!'

'Oh, Captain, is that you? We heard you were dead—how grieved Alister and I were after parting with you.'

'I was reported missing for six months, señora!' said he, with a low bow, and the fascinating smile, half melancholy, half remorseful, which had proved so irresistible in his path through life. 'It is nearly the same thing—sometimes worse indeed—meaning slavery, tortures, indignities; but occasionally, though rarely, one escapes, through the mediation of his Patron Saint, let us say, and has once more the honour to salute his friends—and passengers!'

By this time Mrs. Banneret had moved closer to the romantic personage, to whom she was made known in due form; and the younger members of the family having come up, lured by the report that the tall stranger was a pirate of the Spanish main—or some such dark and terrible adventurer analogous to fascinating outlawry, they were presented severally, but kept gazing as if spell-bound, congratulating themselves upon having seen—even if it were for but once in their lives—a real-life accredited delightful pirate!

'Such a handsome man!' said Hermione. 'It's

not that alone—though, of course, he *is* very handsome, and he has beautiful eyes, that look right through you, and has immense strength, plain for all men to see. But there's the calm dignity of command, a birthright never to be acquired. You feel that such a man *must* be obeyed; that no one would *dare* to resist for one moment. No doubt he has shed blood—which is dreadful to think of—but he has saved life also, and done many merciful and charitable actions—if we only knew.'

'Oh, yes! scores, hundreds,' said Vanda: 'carried starving crowds of natives away from their islands when the crops had failed; picked up canoes at sea when they were beginning to cast lots for one to die to save the rest; and——'

'Don't tell me any more,' pleaded Hermione. 'I can't bear it.'

'And they say that if he was arrested he could be thrown into prison for offences against maritime law—whatever that may be. He *was* arrested at Honolulu, and was a prisoner upon a British man-of-war.'

'Yes!' cried Vanda; 'but they couldn't prove anything against him. So they had to let him go again, and he gave a ball afterwards. So he couldn't have done anything very wicked. He sings, and plays on the violin, and guitar too. What a draw he would be in opera!'

'Mrs. Lilburne says she will *never* forget his kindness to her husband. He got him away from that dreadful island, where he would have died.

So would she. She had a great mind to commit suicide, and was only kept alive by the incessant work in the hospital at Pilot Mount, where she nursed father, and Lord Newstead, and lots of poor miners.'

CHAPTER XIV

'Really,' said Vanda, 'when we want to see our Australian friends, the proper thing is to come to England. We have certainly met more in a month here than we ever did in a year in the colonies.'

'And we never should have fallen across Captain Hay——I beg his pardon, Captain Bucklaw in Australia,' assented Hermione. 'I wonder what will be his end. Something romantic and far from peaceful, I feel certain. Oh, here he comes to say good-bye! Why can't he stay another day, I wonder?'

'Reasons of State! The Captain never stays long in one place, I've remarked,' said Mr. Lilburne, who, with his wife, now joined them. 'He had a wire from his agent that the cargo was complete, and the *Haitchi Maru* only waiting for her commander.'

Mr. and Mrs. Banneret now came forward, while the Lilburnes shook hands warmly with the man who had been their friend in need, whatever might have been his career under other circumstances.

'*We* shall never forget you,' said Mrs. Lilburne; 'you saved two lives when you rescued Alister from that inferno.'

'The Captain knows he may count on us whenever he likes to call,' said her husband. 'We hope to be able to repay him in kind.'

'It was time for us to go, my lads;
It was time for us to go,'

said he, chaunting the refrain of an old sailor-song, in deep melodious tones. 'I have never yet been caught napping, but, believe me, this meeting of true friends will be among the most precious memories of a reckless life, and if any of the present company should find themselves in danger on sea, or land, within a hundred miles of this skipper, he'll effect a diversion if it's in the power of mortal man. But, after all, it's a ten-to-one chance we never meet again. Think of me as one who might have been a better man with better luck. Adios, señora. Adios, Don Carlos Alvarez. Adios, señoritas.' Here he shook hands once more with the men, and bowing low to the girls and Mrs. Banneret, strode away to a swift hansom which awaited him, and disappeared from their eyes.

There was a peculiar feeling, somewhat allied to regret, yet perhaps even more to relief, when their picturesquely lawless friend took his departure. This sentiment was shared in lesser degree by the older, more experienced individuals of the party. But the girls were frankly grieved at the loss of so romantic an acquaintance—the tears, indeed, coming into Vanda's eyes as she realised

that she could hardly hope to know 'a real pirate' again.

'Do you think he really *was* engaged in the Black Flag business—death's head and crossbones, and so on?' queried Eric.

'I don't think that was ever proved,' answered Lilburne; 'more likely a trifle of privateering, or "blackbirding," as labour-recruiting was called in the early days of the Queensland sugar-planting industry. But there *was* a warrant out for him, and, indeed, for Hilary Telfer—that tall, fair man standing near Mrs. Banneret with his lovely wife; he was supercargo on board the famous *Leonora*.'

'What a beautiful creature she is!' said Hermione; 'what a figure, what eyes, and such a face, lit up by a charming smile! She is something like a Spanish girl we saw at Santa Barbara, and yet not quite the same type—far more beautiful, with grace personified. I can't quite place her.'

'She is a descendant of Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, the leader of the mutineers of the *Bounty*, who disappeared somewhere about the year 1788, and formed that very interesting community at Pitcairn Island. They were not discovered until September 1808, when Captain Folger, of the American ship *Topaz*, seeing smoke rising from an island, from which a canoe was approaching, was hailed by the occupants in good Saxon English. "Won't you heave us a rope, now?" was the request from the frail bark, and, a rope being thrown out, a fine young man sprang actively on deck. "I'm Thursday October Christian," he said modestly, "son of Fletcher

Christian, and the first man born on the island." H.M.S. the *Briton* and the *Tagus*—the former commanded by Sir T. Staines—were in search of an American ship which had seized some English whalers, when they suddenly came in sight of an uncharted island. It was Pitcairn, but should have been two hundred miles distant — being placed on the chart by Captain Carteret (who discovered it in 1767) three degrees out of its true longitude.'

'It seems almost incredible,' said Mr. Banneret, 'that a canoe carried on a man's shoulders should be safely handled amidst such terrific surges, but I recollect seeing Australian aboriginals at Two-fold Bay carrying their bark canoes *on their heads* to the water, and fishing successfully when it was by no means smooth. English-speaking strangers proved themselves to be unsurpassed boatmen—to be recognised in the aftertime as such amongst the best whalemen in the world. Twenty years had elapsed since Fletcher Christian and his mutineer associates, with their Tahitian wives, had left Mataavai Bay. During the whole of that time the actors in the tragedy had disappeared from mortal ken as completely as if they had been sunk "deeper than plummet lies," with their broken-up and abandoned vessel the *Bounty*.'

In 1808 Captain Mayhew Folger first came upon the little community of Pitcairn Island; in 1814 the Anglo-Tahitians had increased to the number of forty. Nothing was done by the British Government until 1825, when Captain Beechey, in the *Blossom*, on a voyage of discovery,

paid a visit to Pitcairn Island. A boat under sail was observed coming towards the ship. The crew consisted of old Adams and ten young men of the island. The young men were tall, robust, and healthy, with good-natured countenances, and a simplicity of manner combined with a fear of doing something that might be wrong, which prevented the possibility of giving offence. None of them had shoes or stockings. Adams, in his sixty-fifth year, was dressed in a sailor's shirt and trousers, and wore a low-crowned hat. He still retained his sailor manners, doffing his hat whenever he was addressed by the officers.

Sir Thomas Staines's letter, written on 18th October 1814, stated that every individual on the island (forty in number) spoke excellent English. They proved to be the descendants of the deluded crew of the *Bounty*. The venerable old man, John Adams, was the only surviving Englishman of those who last quitted Tahiti in her. The pious manner in which all those born on the island had been reared, and the correct sense of religion which had been instilled into their young minds by the old man, had given him the pre-eminence over the whole of them. And to him they looked up as the Patriarch of their tribe.

. . . . . .

The great day, the great race was over. The Australian family had enjoyed their modest triumph in seeing the good horse from a sister colony win the blue ribbon of the great cross-country contest, coming in victorious over hedge and ditch,

brook and rail, with the best blood of England eight lengths behind. That was an honour which could never be taken away from them. In years to come any of them would be able to say, 'I saw Moifaa sweep over the four miles and a half of a stiff course (as English people reckon) with as much ease as if it had been a hurdle race. And until we see an imported horse from England win a steeplechase at Flemington, we shall be entitled to hold that the horses bred south of the line possess unequalled speed, stoutness, and jumping ability.'

From the far ocean-surrounded islands of the south land, where still linger the traces of the moa, and the apteryx perplexes the tourist, to the torrid levels of the West Australian fields, where the miner's harvest is weighed and reckoned in ounces of fine gold, the love of athletic sports, which the British emigrants carried with them, has caused their representative champions to be respected from India to the Pole.

After this equine battle of Waterloo it was, of course, natural for the victorious Austro-Britons to fall back upon their base in London—the Hotel Cecil, where they and the Allied Forces might arrange for future operations during the spring and summer campaigns.

The Bannerets were not, as may be imagined, without acquaintances, and, indeed, friends of long standing in high places. Cadets of noble houses had visited Australia in the early 'fifties (1852 to 1856), when the goldfields of Ballarat and Bendigo, Eaglehawk and Maryborough, were at

their marvellous height of productiveness; where, also, the purchase of a few shares overnight might result in a fortune before breakfast for the investor. Besides such glimpses into Aladdin's cave, there was the entirely new spectacle of gold-fields, where the precious metal might be seen in the matrix, and the operations for its extraction by chance workers of every degree of age, nationality, or occupation witnessed. It was a fascinating and novel experience to watch the process in shallow ground, hardly less primitive than the ordinary digging of potatoes: to mark the run-away sailors, farm hands, shepherds, or stock-riders, joking the while, as they occasionally threw up a ten- or twenty-ounce 'nugget' of almost pure gold, worth £4 per ounce, or a lump of the gold-studded quartz, to the tourist bystander peering down the edge of the shaft, with the touching confidence that it would be punctiliously returned, after being wondered at, and perhaps weighed, by the obliged stranger. Such things sound improbable, but are, nevertheless, strictly, rigidly true, as can be avouched by any miner of the period. The neighbouring squatters, in a general way men of birth and breeding, had been pleased to welcome these agreeable strangers to their homes, where, the daughters of the land being often handsome and attractive, the stranger guest had no particular objection to prolonging his stay when his hosts and other neighbouring magnates were so anxious to secure his society.

Lord Salisbury was known to have lived in a

tent, with a friend or two, *more Australico*, and personally, as 'Mr. Cecil,' studied the humours of a 'rush' near Bendigo. As he did not stay long or, presumably, make a fortune, he probably consoled himself with the reflection that he had gained the rare experience of a personal examination of a vast colonial industry at first hand, which would be valuable in forming political opinion as to the treatment of British colonies, under new and original conditions. In the light of his Lordship's ministerial responsibilities in later life, perhaps it was well for him that he should be in a position to observe the process of formation of a British state, with municipal, mercantile, civil, and military functions, of a character befitting the Empire, evolved from the heterogeneous components of a goldfields population. How doubtful, how improbable, that order, achievement, high attainment, should ever have been so produced, contemporary journalists and visitors have left on record. For the proof, *respice finem*, behold the tree-shaded street, broad, straight, tram-pervaded, at Ballarat; the lake where formerly the wild duck swam amid the reedy marsh; the steamers thereon which equalise the traffic; the gardens where the weary tourist may rest, or read, upon a bench prepared by the municipalities, while he gazes around on the wide transformed landscape. Naval officers, cadets of great houses, budding field-marshals, had all been temporarily adopted at Arnold Banneret's paternal home. The middies were now, some of them, admirals; the Honourable Mr. Sedley and Mr. Villiers were now barons

and earls, having 'come into their kingdoms,' so to speak.

They did not forget the friends who had dined and mounted them, provided shooting and hunting parties, thought nothing too good for them; and invitations flowed into the Hotel Cecil for garden parties, dances, dinners—in fact, all the gaieties of the season.

And what a season it was! 'Oh to be in England, now that April's here!' For the nonce it was a fine, warm, even *dry* summer, which enhanced the green glory of the century-old oaks, the 'immemorial elms,' and the various flowers of the great parks and also of the natural woodland. What joy it was to these young people to wander with their brothers along the 'leafy lanes, where the trees met overhead, when the merry brooks ran clear and gay'! To note, lying underneath the aged oaks, the skylark rising from the field, and pealing his matin song of gladness.

> 'Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
> And Phœbus 'gins arise,
> His steeds to water at those springs
> On chaliced flowers that lies;
> And winking Mary-buds begin
> To ope their golden eyes:
> With everything that pretty is,
> My lady sweet, arise!'

quoted Hermione.

Then the wild-flowers: what a feast of plant life! What various colour, shape, bloom—of every shade and tint, from the dingle, 'where the rath violets grow,' to the daffodil bank, by the sun-

kissed lake. 'Isn't that delicious?' said Hermione; 'who but our Shakespeare could have pictured so delightfully the lovely summer of old England, with the hedgerows and the pastures all glistening with dew! That dear lark is coming down again—a living song, floating through the blue ocean of sky—singing as he falls. Then at last dropping like a stone into the field—I saw him close to that patch of red clover.'

'But *we* have skylarks in Australia,' said Vanda, who objected to unqualified praise of England for being England; 'our bird doesn't fly so high, certainly, and stops more quickly, but he sings a sweet little tuneful lay. He has not had a thousand years in which to practise.'

This colloquy took place one morning before breakfast, at which unusual time, about 5 A.M., these young people elected to get up, for once in a way, that they might be enabled to say they had seen an English sunrise, and heard an English skylark. They were staying at an old—ever so old English hall, where everything was in keeping with tradition and history. The century-old oaks were there; the forest was the same, mercifully spared, and lovingly tended; the aged oaks were the immediate descendants of those under which Gurth and Wamba lay and chaunted their roundelay when Bois-Guilbert, the Templar of the period, inquired the way to Rotherwood, and was directed all wrong by the eccentric Wamba.

Yes! there were the oaks, huge of girth, mighty of spread and shade, and clothed to the very tips of their enormous branches with delicate leaflets, burst-

ing buds, and every variety of leafage which goes to furbish up the glorious green garb of an English spring.

Now that the spring had arrived, the real English spring—written about, talked about, sung about by everybody that had ever been in England, or read about the great and glorious Motherland—they were all mad with hope and expectation, also with ardent desire to go in and possess the land of faerie. Fortunately, for once, the climate did not betray them. The weather continued fine and open. Frosts were few and far between. The grass in the meadows, thick and verdant, spread a velvet garment over all the land. Over the fields around stood ancient farm-houses, near villages with names as old as the Norman Conquest. Around were ruined abbeys and crumbling spires, besides bridges over brooks, where swam the fat carp which had tempted the monks to sink their foundations first, and to follow up with the stately piles, which sheltered so many a lordly abbot and his train of cowled brethren, lay and spiritual, with servitors, tenants, and retainers, military and otherwise.

All this strengthened the desire of the Bannerets to establish themselves in a country residence, whence they might issue forth in quest of the more desirable entertainments, at the same time preserving the home feeling, and having a *pied à terre* which would give them standing in the county superior to that of mere birds of passage.

The girls of the family, now that the spring was distinctly on, and the summer, by natural course of nature, might be expected to follow,

desired no change. They felt, and indeed repeatedly affirmed, that their cup of joy was full—that they never expected to be so truly, consciously, ecstatically happy. Every night Hermione and Vanda retired, after a day filled with novel and delicious sensations, to dream of a new kind of felicity on the morrow; a forecast the reality of which rarely disappointed them. Their parents occasionally uttered a note of warning as to the too eager pursuit of pleasure, and the need of moderation even, on the score of health. But there was small reason for caution on that score: the young people had exceptionally strong constitutions—sound, unworn, and elastic, with all the marvellous recuperative power of early youth. Their cousins and friends in the country districts of Australia had been known to ride thirty or forty miles to a ball, at which to dance until daylight afterwards, with but little or no fatigue. They belonged to the same type, and were not a whit behind them in endurance, defying fatigue or lassitude where pleasure or interesting travel was concerned. So all manner of recreative experiences had been tested—hackneys for the park, rides and drives, concerts and theatres, balls and parties, receptions given by certain returned Governors, to whom they had been socially known in Australia. These proconsuls lost no time in inviting them to entertainments where they met various great ones of the land, to whom it was explained that they were really 'nice'—distinguished even in a sense, and ever so rich—owning gold mines of unquestioned, almost fabulous richness.

There was then no difficulty about invitations

and engagements; the trouble was to keep up with them all, and so arrange that they did not clash, and at the same time to find out the right people at whose entertainments to be 'seen.' They were naturally popular in this new environment, with more or less foreign elements. The girls were voted pretty (Hermione, indeed, was very handsome), well dressed, well mannered, and above all 'nice'—that mysterious adjective which goes for so much in English society. The young men, too, were good-looking, well turned out, and so closely resembling Englishmen of their age and standing, that surprise was expressed that they should be Australians, there being no peculiarity of accent, or appearance, betokening their colonial origin. They were also athletic beyond average form—being skilled at tennis, cricket, and other fashionable games.

Now the vitally important matter next on hand was the selection of a home. Mr. Banneret, after due consideration, had decided to invest in an estate. The Hotel Cecil was well managed, comfortable, even luxurious. It was, of course, expensive, even perhaps extravagant. But that was not the reason for disapproval. Money was no object, as the phrase runs.

Still, Arnold Banneret and his wife disliked hotel life *en permanence*. The continual change of acquaintances, with whom a certain sort of association was almost impossible to avoid, was distasteful to them. They did not, as their experience matured, think it, in all respects, beneficial to the girls. For them and their brothers they

wished to re-create the home feeling. They longed for the change once more to peaceful country life—where they might live among such neighbours as made the chief rural luxury, and secure, if such might be, valuable and enduring friendships.

To this end it was decided to *buy* an estate. Leased houses, with perhaps suitable grounds, furniture, and belongings, were all very well in their way. But people's ideas about furniture and other matters differed widely sometimes. And, at the delivering-up day, misunderstandings were likely to arise—had arisen within their experience. Thus it was decided to buy. They could then comfort themselves with knowing that they were safely settled for years to come—could not be turned out by the whim of the proprietor, or any one else. And if the worst came to the worst, and circumstances compelled them to return to their own country, they could, of course, re-sell; and as estates in England, valuable and well placed, did not vary much in value, they could get their money back without serious deduction.

The girls at first did not take kindly to the idea. They found their present mode of existence much to their taste. But their mother had with some regret observed that a subtle change was taking place in the character of her daughters. Constant amusement, of course, they had no difficulty in procuring. It was furnished without effort on their part. But it pained her to discover that an alteration of taste was even now showing itself. They did not care so much for the more

rational forms of amusement; they began to crave more and more for excitement; and provided that it was of a sufficiently novel and bizarre nature, they seemed, to her watchful eye, to be growing more and more careless of surroundings, and of the status of the people with whom they were necessarily associated.

In order to combat this feeling, and to render the departure from the Hotel Cecil, and its continuous round of gaieties, less depressing, Mrs. Banneret began diplomatically to descant upon the more permanently attractive features of English country life, — the ancient trees, the historical associations of the manor-house and the grounds; the neighbouring gentry, the hunting fixtures, the pleasant parties made up for shooting, coursing, fishing, and other time-honoured sports, for the performance of which desirable guests would be brought down from town or invited from neighbouring families; the archery meetings, after which it was the fashion of the county to have impromptu dances; the hounds on the lawn, the distinguished personages, the aristocratic M.F.H., the 'coffee-house' feature of the meets, the hunting women, the road riders, their friends, and other people's friends, the garden parties—in short, all the hundred and one pleasant meetings, half sport, half business, which only a country life could adequately provide.

'Think,' she said, 'my dear girls, what a different life it would be for us all! Your father is pining for a return to regular home life, such

as he and I enjoyed when you were little, and which, in spite of the troubles of a Gold Commissioner's life, we even now look back upon as our happiest days. He wants to have a decent stable, a couple of hacks, a brace or two of hunters; his phaeton pair, and a dogcart horse; a landau for me and you on great occasions; a safe hunter apiece for you girls, and perhaps another, or so, for a friend. Besides, with a moderate-sized estate—ten or twelve thousand acres—he can enjoy some shooting and amateur farming, which will give him healthy exercise—he doesn't get enough now, and it's bad for him. He's getting too stout; you see that yourselves, don't you? Then we shall be the Bannerets of Hexham Hall. I feel quite like the Lady of the Manor already.'

As the good matron kept summing up the joys of this ideal life—the glorious awakening in the fresh, sweet atmosphere of the country, the song of the birds, the dewy lawns—the girls watched her face glow and her eyes sparkle with almost youthful lustre. They could bear the situation no longer.

'Mother! dear mother!' cried Hermione, 'don't go on—I can't bear it. We have been wicked, selfish girls not to have seen it before. I thought you and father had been looking out of spirits lately. I see now how it was telling on you. We'll go, Vanda, wherever we are told. It's a shame that we should have had to be asked. Only we must have a family council before the place—the manor, the castle, or whatever it is to

be—is finally decided upon. It can't be so very dreadful after all.'

'Dreadful!' cried Vanda; 'it's delicious. I'll undertake the dairy—and we must have lots of lovely tiles, and such cream-pans, and a floor like glass, and walls that can be washed down twice a day. The next thing is to find the Castle of Otranto. Will there be ruins, ghosts, and a helmet to fall down with a crash? I must have vaults, too, and a secret passage, where the former lord of the castle was concealed when the Roundheads sacked it. And such a range of stabling, too! I must have two hunters if I am to keep up my riding.'

The sons gave their unhesitating opinion in favour of the estate. Land was cheap in England at present—many of the owners being only too glad to get rid of property which paid ridiculously low in interest on capital, and was year by year involving the so-called proprietor in heavier expense. As to the value of a large historic family mansion, it was looked upon as the proverbial white elephant, which the owners would be only too pleased to get rid of, once and for ever.

Then the choice—that was the difficulty. Arnold Banneret shuddered when he thought of the scores of desirable places, old and half-ruinous, ill-drained, decayed, damp, smothered in ivy, shaded by vast growths of world-old groves that it would be sacrilege to cut down, and death by slow and gradual process to leave unaltered. The new mansion ghastly with stucco—redolent of fresh paint—the mistaken ambition of the manu-

facturer, tired of so soon after the contractor was paid, and disgracefully new like the baronetcy; these and other failures, like Banquo's line of shadowy kings, passed before him in review, until he almost resolved to cut the whole concern and go back to Australia, where, at any rate, one could enjoy one's life in peace. This was after a long day's rail to examine an over-praised, over-valued, highly unsuitable investment, with too much house and too little land—both being indecently inferior in quality, besides being in a dull and undesirable county.

'It was thought,' declared the agent, 'that it would just suit a gentleman from Australia, being a bit wild-like, and not too trim and polished up, as it were.' He seemed surprised at being curtly informed that a man did not come all the way from Australia to encumber himself with an indifferent house and exceptionally bad land, as the attempts at crops plainly showed; that he had been misled by the advertisement, and would be sorry to take the place as a gift.

This was a bad beginning, but his wife comforted him by saying that she could see that he had been so bored by inaction that he was evidently glad of the chance of taking a journey *somewhere*, if only to end in disappointment; that she was glad to see that he had so much of his old energy left; that she must go with him next time, when better counsels would prevail, and success attend them eventually.

At length, after tedious delays and disappointing inspections of every kind of country house—

mansion, manor, and historic castellated abode—even including a moat, an altogether satisfactory purchase was effected. The place was historic, a royal princess had lived there under strict guardianship during her nonage. The place was certainly far from modern in outward appearance, but the interior had been restored tastefully, and in accordance with the latest requirements, by the owner, who, having fallen upon evil times, was only too pleased to take a moderate price in cash for a property which, with costly renovation and additions, had cost a third more than the sale price. When the probable purchaser and his wife ran down by train to have a full and leisurely inspection, they were more pleased than they cared to show at the *coup d'œil.*

It was the early forenoon. The day was fine—the air mild, almost breezeless ; the great oaks, the venerable elms, the ancient walls which surrounded the ' pleasaunce,' gave the whole place the look of a monarch's retreat for the time when he might wish to rest from the cares of State and enjoy a rare solitude, apart from the crowding cares of sovereignty and the distraction of churchmen and contending nobles.

Such indeed had Hexham Hall been in the days of old. Princesses had lived there in the time of their tutelage—princesses who must have chafed, and perhaps cherished rebellious thoughts ; perhaps dreamed over the policy which they would carry out when they became queens—for queens they did become in due course of time, and having uncontrolled power, they did carry out that

policy; nor was blood spared in the process which a lofty and fearless ideal of the 'might, majesty, and dominion' of Britain demanded. An estate of twelve thousand acres went with the property.

It was favourably situated in the matter of sport and social centres. Several packs of hounds met within easy distance. The shooting was good, and had been carefully preserved. There was a trout stream such as would have delighted the heart of the 'Compleat Angler,' particularly a stretch of water not far from a ruined mill, which, owing to latter-day mechanical inventions, had been put out of commission.

There was a gamekeeper who went with the estate, and whose keen, courageous expression at once enlisted the sympathies of the younger Australians. His cottage, his neatly dressed wife and children, with their air of deep respectfulness and old-fashioned curtseys, delighted them beyond mention. The coops with young pheasants—the lovely setters and retrievers—private property of the keeper—such a dear feudal name, as Vanda observed: these were some of the new possessions which went far to reconcile the daughters of the house to their removal from the Hotel Cecil, with its endless joys.

The purchase of the baronial residence of Hexham Hall had been carried to completion with marvellous ease and celerity.

The Bannerets' legal representative had met the family lawyer of the Hexham properties, and after certain conferences, with more or less courteous

but pointed argument, a cheque signed by Arnold Banneret for the largest amount ever drawn by him was handed over, in exchange for which acquittances and title-deeds, some of curiously ancient date, were deposited in Messrs. Close and Carforth's deed-box.

The Australian family now felt themselves to be invested with all manner of feudal attributes; not perhaps quite including the privilege of 'pit and gallows,' but, for all that, delightfully autocratic of flavour and suggestion. They began to feel reconciled.

After the removal from town, which was effected with exceptional speed and completeness, a rearrangement of the furniture was, of course, necessary. The owner, an impoverished Earl with a family, had lived on the Continent for years past. He therefore welcomed the possession of so large a sum in cash, a portion of which, much to his private gratification, he was enabled to devote to the clearing off of long-standing debts, as well as to matters of family convenience. Lord Hexham, indeed, came over from Bruges to ratify all arrangements made by agents and representatives, and to have, as he explained to Mr. Banneret, a short 'run up to town on his own,' so as to look in at his clubs, to escape the monotony of the life at Bruges, which, though economically prudent, was far from entertaining. 'Nothing to do, day after day, but to look at that confounded Cathedral, which I know by heart—and all the Johnnies rave about till it's perfectly sickenin'. Never cared much about architecture

—hardly know whether my own place is Tudor or Gothic. Most awfully obliged to you, my dear fellow, for taking it off my hands, and so on. Benefactor to the deservin' poor, don't-cher-know —that sort of thing. Is there anything I can do to oblige you? Only say the word!'

'I don't see that there is anything more,' said the purchaser, 'that isn't included in the agreement. Oh, by the bye, there are a few articles of furniture, an old dower-chest with parchments, some antique volumes, charters, and so on. I'm a bit of an antiquarian in my leisure hours—having more than I care for now, sorry to say. Would your man of law put a price upon them—that is, of course, if you have no dislike to part with them —heirlooms probably?'

'Would I turn them into cash? Like a bird, my dear fellow—your man and mine can fight it out between them. You could have the title too, if there was no law to prevent it. Many a time I've wished I could melt it, like the family plate. Some of it *has* gone that way. You smile! It's the "frozen truth," as our friend Lady Neuchatel says.'

'Of course you're joking; your family succession——'

'Not a bit of it. Talked it over with her Ladyship and the children many a time. Jack, my eldest son—he's in the Guards—quite agrees with me. So do the girls. "Oh, take the cash, and let the title go." Saw it in *Omar Khayyám*, she said. Clever girl, Corisande! "Broken gods no use any more, in modern times, without the money.

Rank without money the worst form of genteel poverty." Give you my word, Mr. Banneret, it's most refreshin' start I've had for years. To think of a decent credit at one's private bank account! Excuse my high spirits—makes me feel like a boy again—not good form, I admit, but situation exceptional.'

Arnold Banneret and this impoverished peer 'got on,' as the phrase is, wonderfully well together. Like most Englishmen of rank, he was utterly unaffected, never having had to take thought about his position, or to trouble himself as to the amount of consideration due to it. Sufficient deference is cheerfully yielded to Lords and Honourables in England and her colonies, whether rich or poor, as long as they merit respect from personal character. If they are not so honoured it is entirely due to their want of the qualities which are attributed to their birth and breeding. Lord Hexham had been in the army; had sold out when he succeeded to the title; married shortly afterwards, and, without being very extravagant, had lived a careless, easy life, until the foreclosure of a long-standing mortgage, and the accumulation of unpaid debts and obligations, compelled a surrender. His family was fairly large—four sons and three daughters—the eldest son in the army, second navy, two younger boys still at school. For the girls—Corisande was grown up; Adeline coming on, ambitious and slightly combative; Mildred still with her governess. When all liabilities had been liquidated or arranged, it was decided in a sort of

advisory committee, partly composed of creditors and partly of relatives, that the family must settle for the next few years in a cheap place, somewhere on the Continent, where the girls could learn music and languages. But all expensive amusements—travel, sport, house in town, yachting, etc.—must be done with once and for all. If the rents were regularly devoted to payment of creditors and the release of mortgages for a few years, the estate would be, perhaps not quite free from debt, but in a condition to allow the head of the house a reasonable income, and to afford the young people all the reasonable social advantages to which, by their birth and station, they had a natural claim. The position was felt by the Earl to be, in some respects, 'rather hard lines upon a fellow who hadn't had much spending out of the big indebtedness which had brought the family ship aground.' But it was felt that there was nothing else for it, and his Lordship, taking his wife's advice, submitted to it with a fairly good grace.

'Deuced hard for your Ladyship, come to think —and the girls won't like it one bit. But they're young, and will get their music, and all the rest of it, as good in Bruges, perhaps better, than in London—cheaper too, ever so much cheaper. Jack and Falkland will be fighting England's foes on sea and land. Mustn't outrun the constable, though; but they're steady chaps, particularly Jack—that's one comfort. And if—I say if—we can put in five years in this kind of rustication, well, we're not too old yet; we may look forward

to a clean sheet, and a little reasonable fun, in our —what's the old song say ?—" our declinin' days," declinin' days—that's good, isn't it ? Well, I'll try to do my part—I *know* you'll do yours.'

That settled it. The hunters, the carriage horses, the park hacks, were sold ; the choice little herd of Jerseys, the greyhound kennel, were disposed of. The well-known historic estate of Hexham was finally sold out and out, to the wonder and surprise of the country people, who had a fixed idea that it belonged to the Crown, or, in some mysterious way, could not be disposed of without the royal sanction. However, it *was* sold, everything advertised in the county paper, and a large attendance witnessed the disposal of all the belongings and valuables not secured by special deed of settlement.

The all-important transaction being legally, equitably, peacefully concluded, everything being brought to the hammer—a few heirlooms in the shape of pictures, statuary, etc., being reserved,— Lord Hexham gave up his right and title to house and lands, and the new family acquired possession of the old Hall and the old acres.

It was a portentous proceeding, the girls considered, who acknowledged a feeling half of awe and half of triumph as they found themselves in possession of the ancient keep, with embattled walls, towers, and a portion of a deep and broad moat. They were driven through the Norman archway, seen through great elms and walnut trees, partly concealing the quaint high chimneys of the outbuildings, preserved through the en-

treaties, even threats, of Lady Ermentrude. The Dowager Countess reached her ninetieth year before she surrendered her state and the deference which she exacted as due to the most exalted pedigree in Britain. A portion of 'the flanking towers, with turrets high,' did certainly look rather grim and menacing, favouring the idea that an attack in force might be expected at any time. But the remaining portion of the great building, or rather the collection of buildings, had been so modernised, that the perfection of comfort and artistic elegance demanded by latter-day life had been secured, combined with the luxurious amplitude of quasi-royal apartments. It was wonderful how the huge building had lent itself to ornamentation, to surprises, and luxurious lounging nooks and corners. Here quiet converse might be had by congenial spirits, or wide landscapes surveyed, beauteous with glimpses of lake and river varying the cultured sweep of pasture and arable, which seemed only to end with the horizon.

CHAPTER XV

By the time that arrangements were fully completed, Lord Hexham and the Banneret family had become quite intimate, and in a sense confidential. He had dined with them at the Cecil, where Australian friends were asked to meet him in a quiet way. He was a sociable personage, and the more he saw of his successors at Hexham Hall the more he liked them. Between cultured men of the world there is a certain freemasonry, which deprives social intercourse of all *gêne* and awkwardness, no matter to what country they belong.

With Mrs. Banneret and her girls his Lordship was much impressed, feeling, as he told her truly, as if he had known them for years. He saw how she sympathised with him ; the hard necessity for the eviction—so to speak—of this noble family, after their long and close connection with their ancient home, appealed to her tender heart. Underneath his affectedly frivolous treatment of the subject she divined, with a woman's intuitive perception, that there was, could not but be, a sore feeling—rising at times to remorse—at the thought

that, by his own neglect and indolent mental drift, he had forfeited the heritage of his race. To the family change of circumstances she never referred, but he was aware that it was in her thoughts. In her calm, undemonstrative way she conveyed the idea of regret in the abstract, as inseparable from such an exodus. And in his heart he honoured her for the unspoken sympathy.

When the Earl departed for the United Service Club in London, he wrote, thanking Mrs. Banneret and her husband for their hospitable kindness, and, for which he was even more grateful, their delicate consideration for a ruined man —conscious only too keenly of his own shortcomings and inefficient stewardship.

The merry month of May passed with credit, having provided, for once in a way, appropriate weather, including a decent average of sunshine. The midsummer month arrived in all the glory of that delicious time, of roses and lilies, with all vernal triumphs. And now, in the second week of June—flushed June—came to pass a wondrous equine exhibition, the carnival of coach and harness perfection, unapproachable for form and fashion in any other land under the sun — the meeting of the Four-in-Hand Club! What an ecstasy of excitement and admiration possessed these young people when, at the Magazine in Hyde Park, twenty coaches, utterly perfect in their appointments, lined up.

First in order was Colonel Sir Alfred Somerset's team of chestnuts—not the famous one of three piebalds and a skewbald, so well known, so

much admired, in days gone by. Next, the regimental team of the Coldstream Guards—the grey team of last year, driven by Sir Pleydell Bouverie; Mr. Hope Morley's bays, a miracle of matching and stepping together; Colonel Frank Shuttleworth's black browns; Lord Newlands' favourite team of dark browns. Then comes another, at which the girls exclaimed, as original and striking—Captain Valentine's two chestnuts, a roan and a bay; Sir Henry Ewart's fine chestnuts, with Mr. Albert Brassey's well-known bays. Mr. Banneret recognised the tall figure of Lord Loch, driving the Grenadier Guards' bay team.

The horses, of course, commended themselves to the Australian family by their size, power, action, and perfect matching, except, of course, in the cases of intentional chequers of colour. Their lofty crests, their high action, the wonderful finish of harness, coach, livery, servants, and appointments generally, they admitted to transcend anything within their experience. Then the perfect 'form' of the drivers, gloved, hatted, 'frockered,' and generally turned out *à merveille*, unapproachable, unequalled in Christendom, or elsewhere.

'They can't help carrying themselves well,' said Eric, 'with bearing-reins; their heads braced up to the same angle—driven on the bar, too. Not much chance of their pulling unreasonably or getting away with the driver—full of corn and rest as they undoubtedly are. It's a lovely sight for people who understand horses.'

'All the same,' contended paterfamilias, 'they

are rather heavy for any work except this show business, and would be none the worse for a blood-cross. With stages of twenty or twenty-five miles and back, our Australian teams would be easily in the lead ; none the worse for it either, on the following day. But these horses are not expected to do real work.'

'Oh, it's idle to depreciate these turn-outs,' said Hermione. 'Nothing in the world can be finer ! How I should like to be on the box-seat of that coach with the lovely chestnuts—Captain Quintin Dick's, aren't they ? And going on to Hurlingham afterwards ? We must have a look at the polo there, some fine day. Do we know any one there in that behalf ? as I heard a lawyer say in father's Court, one day.'

'Yes, we do !' stated Vanda, with some eagerness. 'Of course there's Captain Neil Haig ; he was A.D.C. to the Governor in West Australia. He played in Melbourne, don't you remember, against the crack Western Club. Four Englishmen against four Australians. It was a drawn game—he's a wonderful hitter.'

It was agreed, *nem. con.*, that a party should be made up for Hurlingham the next time there was a match on. Following which arrangement the conversation became general, until, shortly after one o'clock, Mr. Lovegrove gave the word, and the procession, headed by the President, Lord Ancaster, moved off ; some of the coaches going on to Hurlingham, as arranged in the programme.

'There can't be anything finer under the sun, for form and finish,' declared Reggie, 'but the

American coaching in Australia for cross-country work, over bad roads, for speed and punctuality has greatly the advantage. Their coaches and teams, of course, do not compare in the matter of appearance, and are not expected to. But the passengers are better accommodated, and the American cross-handed style of holding the reins gives better, greater power over the team. Think, for instance, of having to handle six or seven horses at night—three in the lead, with a heavily loaded coach and indifferent roads. The lamps too, placed on high, are more numerous, thus throwing the light farther out ahead. The service is more efficient and satisfactory than the English fashion, which prevailed in Australia until quite recently.'

'Everything in its own place,' said Mrs. Banneret. 'The pioneer work in Britain was finished centuries ago. In our Greater Britain it has only lately begun. Our young men have rough work and different results to look to. Let us hope that they may learn in time to combine use and ornament.'

'That's where these English fellows beat us, I must say,' interposed Eric. 'Looking at them there, sitting up as if they were only intended to drive accurately, to advertise their teams and their tailors, one might think that they couldn't do anything else—never had done. There could be no greater mistake. They *have* done all sorts of things—great things, many of them—but you'd never know it from themselves. The Englishman doesn't talk. You must hear his exploits

from some one else. You never will from himself.'

'I'm afraid people don't think that way about us,' said Vanda dolefully. 'In fact, they say just the opposite sometimes—when they quote Anthony Trollope, who frequently mentioned the word "blow," which is Australian for "boast." That will be rectified by and by. We are a baby nation, so far, but will calm down to the regular, steady, solid Anglo-Saxon march. We're only excitable—being in the midst of "war's alarms" at present—likely enough to be dragged in, too, if these Russian cruisers keep on raiding our commerce.'

'Oh, Vanda! you don't say so?' said Hermione, who was not disposed to throw down the gauntlet to Russia just yet, though much in sympathy with Japan. 'Think what a dreadful thing war is!'

'It's a much more dreadful thing,' said her sister, 'not to fight to the death for home and hearth. Think of dear old Australia being overrun by the Yellow Peril, or even our kind friends, the Russians and Germans.'

'But surely there can be no danger of the Chinese making war upon us? Consider how unwarlike a people they are! and how thousands of them would fly before disciplined troops.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said Mr. Banneret. 'General Gordon was of opinion that, if well led by European officers, in whom they had confidence, they were equal to any troops in the world. As for the danger of the irruption of the Goths and Vandals, the late Sir Henry Parkes, a veteran

statesman, was of opinion during the latter years of his life that Australia's greatest danger in the future would be from the proximity of such nations as China and Japan, immensely superior in numbers, and becoming gradually possessed of all the scientific arms of precision. He probably had in his mind China and Japan, the inhabitants of which countries, our legislators, led by the labour party, have laid themselves out to insult and degrade.'

'Seems unfair, doesn't it?' said Reggie. 'In our policy of "Government by the poor," they scarcely grasped the idea of a combined Japanese and Chinese force,—with a score of ironclads, landing an army corps in North Queensland, and marching south!'

'But what would England's Navy be doing all the time?' demanded Vanda.

'England's Navy,' replied Reggie, 'might have something else to do at that particular time—more especially if Russia, Germany, and perhaps France, chose to consider it a befitting time to teach these proud islanders that the "sea, and all that in them is," was not their inalienable birthright. Besides, it's a long way to come, and our noble army of town-bred artisans, back-block shearers, swagmen, and shepherds would make no great stand against their countless hordes. The coast all looted, with banks and treasuries rifled, as also private property of all kinds; the city population helpless in the hands of the ruthless spoilers. Think of it! It would then be a case of "Oh, weep for fair Australia!" as an Australian poet sang a year or two since.'

'What a ghastly picture—a kind of Verestchagin nightmare! It's enough to freeze the blood in one's veins. And what power could come to our aid? Oh, I know! Blood is thicker than water. When it came to the actual spectacle of a British Commonwealth submerged beneath a flood of barbarism, America would come to our aid. The "Stars and Stripes" would "chip in," as they say. The Dominion of Canada, more loyal than Britain itself——'

'New Zealand too—that makes a respectable number of Allied Forces,' said her father, smiling at the girl's eagerness.

'But the mere conception of such a calamity,' he continued, 'makes one's flesh creep. When one reckons up the toil and thought which the subduing of the wilderness has cost, the labour and the treasure expended in building up these fair cities—these grand provinces, this population of British blood and nurture, not inferior to any people in the world; to believe that the fruit of heroic colonisation, for which noble lives have been spent, noble blood shed, should have been all for nought—for worse than nothing—for ruin and desolation—the degradation of a nation, as in the old-world chronicles, about which we read, and take no heed; then, and then indeed, might one come to doubt the purpose of the Most High, the Divine plan of Providence, the beneficent scheme of the Universe.'

. . . . . .

The business of the installation of the new family was not completed without a fair allowance of work and labour, even excitement.

There necessarily remained much to do before the final arrangements were complete. An additional morning-room for the girls was to be chosen, in which to write and make society arrangements, to receive their friends, to hold informal afternoon teas, and to perform any kind of needlework, and literary pastime, quietly and reposefully.

Of course furniture for some of the principal reception-rooms had to be purchased and arranged. Grave councils were held before this scheme could be carried out. But at length everything was completed, and the collective taste of the family fully satisfied.

Then the first step, an important one in county neighbourhoods at home or abroad, was taken —the Bannerets went to church *en famille*. The Vicar, the Rev. and Honourable Cyril Courtenay, had called, as soon after their arrival as was consistent with etiquette, in advance of his lady parishioners. This proceeding he justified on the ground of his wish to make himself acquainted with the religious tendencies of the new Squire and the rest of the family, with whom, by virtue of his position, he would be brought into closer than ordinary contact.

He was agreeably surprised to find at the first interview with the new potentate and his wife that harmonious relations were likely to exist. Mr. Banneret, as an Anglican churchman, was quite prepared to join cordially with Mr. Courtenay in promoting the welfare of the parish; promising at once liberal donations to the funds of

the charitable societies, nursing clubs, and all such benevolent arrangements for the welfare of the poor. Mrs. Banneret had acted in similar positions before, and was quite willing to take a leading part in Dorcas societies, and other institutions for the benefit of widows, and labourers' families, such as are always in a state of chronic or accidental distress in the most happily situated parishes.

The Vicar, speaking for the laymen of his diocese, was thankful, he might say, most grateful to Providence, that had so 'shaped our ends,' in a manner so unforeseen, while so beneficial to the church and to the needs of this long-neglected parish. Mrs. Courtenay, he needed not to say, would be only too happy to work in concert with Mrs. Banneret in all parish and church matters. She would pay her respects on an early date to the new Lady of the Manor. So the Vicar took his departure, leaving the Hall, as he told his wife, in a much more cheerful state of mind than had formerly been his experience after interviews with the ruling powers of Hexham.

Rarely, indeed, had he been able to extract subscriptions for urgent needs of the church, however strongly he might paint the discreditable state of the venerable edifice and the poverty of the village poor. Lord Hexham was uniformly polite—he could not be otherwise to the Vicar, a contemporary of his own at Cambridge, and a personal friend. But his logic was unanswerable: he had no money to spare—hadn't had for years —never should have again, as far as he could

make out. Lady Hexham was refined and courteous, but the parable was unaltered. She could hardly pay for the girls' frocks, for the boys' uniforms; next year they might not have bread to eat. Rents were falling; certainly the agent received them, and disposed of them mysteriously to a bank, she heard. Only a fraction seemed to come their way. Once upon a time the tenants paid cheerfully; even admitted—wonderful to relate—that they had sold their crops well, had had a good year. But even so, when butter, beef and mutton, cheese and fruit, came in from the colonies and America in overwhelming quantities, what was the use of a good season if the prices went down to depths unheard of—and stayed there? As for the agent, it was needless to think of asking *him* to reduce a rent on cottage or holding, however small.

'It's asking me to rob his Lordship of his dues, simply, or else the mortgagee, which comes to the same thing. I'm powerless — otherwise should have been happy—*most* happy to contribute. As a private individual you are welcome to my guinea annually, as usual.'

With civil speeches and scant coin the Rev. Cyril had perforce to be content. He recognised the justice of the argument. The family would have subscribed reasonably, if not liberally, to all the customary calls upon the Lord of the Manor, if the head of the house could have afforded it. But he could not afford it, and there was an end of the matter. The parish, the tenantry, and the neighbours—a few staunch friends of the family

perhaps excepted—would be not sorry to exchange an impecunious proprietor, too poor and hampered by debts and mortgages to do anything for sport or charity, unable to entertain, or in almost any way to keep up an appearance befitting the descendants of Raoul de ——, who had 'come over with the Conqueror,' and having *more majorum* married the heiress of ——, had entered into possession of the Hexham lands and feudal privileges, together with as much of the adjacent common land as a rapacious Norman baron, high in favour with an unscrupulous sovereign, could by force or fraud manage to appropriate. The descendants of such a man should have been able to not only freely disburse the customary manorial dues, but to keep up all state and dignity befitting the position. As he could not, the villagers concluded that it was the next best thing to welcome the new family, who, though they had come from a wild sort of country—as they'd heard tell on—called Horstrailier—seemed a decentish sort, and, anyhow, were well off, and did the thing respectable. So the village church bells were rung, and the new family was greeted by a crowd of some fifty odd souls, comprising a large proportion of women and children, who hurrahed, and made formal demonstrations of welcome, as the carriage and a string of railway cabs, with servants and luggage, passed through the Tudor gateway, and drew up inside the more ornately modern portico of the baronial hall.

The girls at once rushed up to their rooms, where, as their own maid and some other house

servants had been sent down the day before, they were able to appreciate the view and make ready for lunch. This meal they professed themselves ready to enjoy with a true country appetite—as the morning had been more or less exciting, even in a sense fatiguing. It was fortunately a fine day, so that the beauty of the grass, the foliage, the surrounding landscape, impressed them strongly.

'Oh, what an Eden of a place!' said Hermione. 'How happy we shall be! How thankful we ought to consider ourselves in having come into such a delightful home, and, what is of more consequence, having the means to keep it up.'

'Oh, yes!' assented Vanda, 'we ought to have a good time, but I'm not sure that we shall be really happier than we were in dear old Sydney, when we first went to live in Charlotte Bay Place. What a glorious view there was of the Heads and the harbour! What boating picnics we used to have! I should like to go back there some day. Here we shall have to live a quiet English country life, being good to the poor, and so on, like the girls in Jane Austen's books. There'll be no adventure about it. I suppose the Vicar will want us to teach in his Sunday school.'

'You needn't teach there if you don't wish. Mother won't compel you, I'm sure,' replied Hermione. 'I think I shall rather like it after all the racketing and gaiety we've had in London. I feel as if a reposeful life here would be a pleasing change. My conscience has been troubling me lately, for taking all the good things of life and making no return. It seems so selfish and ungrateful.'

'Oh, well,' said Vanda, 'perhaps one would feel more contented if one had a few good works to put on the credit side of the account. I know I've been rather dissipated lately. This quiet country life may do us good, in more ways than one. Oh, mother' (as Mrs. Banneret came in to see if the young people were ready, and to notify that the great bell for luncheon was about to clang), 'Hermione and I have just resolved to be good. We are going to visit the poor, and teach in the Sunday school, and do our duty, just like the Jane Austen girls.'

'I am very pleased to hear it, my dears; only I don't wish you to take such a resolution in any but a serious sense, and an earnest resolve to do your duty and set an example, as far as in you lies, to the people among whom our lot for some years, if not always, will be cast. You have had all the rational amusement, and quite a full allowance of what the world calls pleasure, to last you for some time. I quite agree with you that it will be a good opportunity to begin in some respects a different and, with God's grace, a higher life.'

On the Sunday morning following this important conversation, the Banneret family made their appearance in the roomy enclosure which had been for many generations consecrated to the use of the Lord of the Manor, his family, and apparently as many of his relations and dependants as he chose thus to honour. The church was fairly well filled, as it happened, much to the gratification of the Vicar, who was not displeased to note the presence of neighbouring magnates,

with their wives, who from time to time directed an intermittent gaze towards the new occupants of the Hall pew. Arnold Banneret with his wife and daughters made a good appearance therein. Indeed it had been for some years unoccupied, during the absence of the family abroad: such being the traditional custom. Mrs. Banneret and her daughters were well but quietly dressed—her wish to that effect having been gently but firmly expressed. 'We have recently come from town,' she said; 'it is reported, no doubt, that we are very rich. In this quiet place nothing could be more vulgar than any display of fashion bordering upon finery.' This settled the matter. The dresses were studiously plain; so much so, that the rustics of the congregation were secretly disappointed in not seeing unusual splendour, doubting in consequence whether the new-comers were so rich as they had been led to believe.

As the service proceeded, the thought came into the mind of this Australian squire of the many differing localities and positions in which he, with his wife and children, had worshipped before they came to this lordly abode. Not infrequently had he been the officiating lay minister, reading the Burial Service over the dead miner, victim of some sudden landslip or premature explosion; reciting the words of the litany, now sounding in his ears, in a half-finished wooden building, roofed with eucalyptus bark or corrugated iron; driving miles through snow for the purpose, or in mid-summer crossing the brick-red plain, amid dust and simoom-like

blasts. Through all these incongruous scenes, and from these and a hundred other various parts played by him in the great drama of life, he had emerged safe and unharmed. Not only unharmed, but placed in this position of honour and dignity —by no merit of his own, but by the operation of, apparently, the primary forces of Nature. Riches, too, had been added for the further advantage and enjoyment of those whom he loved more—yes, far more, than his own life. Ought he not then, out of the fulness of a heart welling over with gratitude, to echo the solemn prayer of the concluding litany ?

At the conclusion of the service, the mail-phaetons, dog-carts, carriages, and other vehicles showed that some at least of the parishioners had a distance to come, which necessitated driving. The party from the Hall were scarcely a half-mile from the church, so that there was no need for taking out the carriage. The family, as a whole, were good pedestrians—'The short walk was quite a pleasure,' as Vanda told every one, 'and it would have been absurd to take out the horses.'

When Lord Hexham returned to his family at Bruges, after a concluding week in London, in which to show himself to his clubs, and have a little social companionship with old friends and comrades, he took with him a letter from Mrs. Banneret, of so sympathetic and unaffectedly kind a nature, that Lady Hexham nearly relented. She would have been indeed more than human if she had not felt the least little bit of envy and jealousy of these people from a far country, who

had entered into their labours, so to speak, for no other reason than the chance possession of more money than they knew what to do with. Hard, no doubt, did it seem to her, that while she and her girls had to stint and save, scarcely able to afford themselves decent frocks, the daughters of these *nouveaux riches* should have their Paris gowns noticed in every fashion paper, and described as 'confections,' and so on, of the latest style. They were also seen at Ascot, royal Ascot, these new dwellers in their ancestral halls, their property in which, owing to the extravagance of one generation and the apathetic indifference of the next, had gradually declined, and was now lost to the family for ever.

However, his Lordship's persistent advocacy of their claims to consideration gradually weakened her prejudices, finally inducing her to reply to Mrs. Banneret's letter in manner approaching to the spirit in which it was written.

'You know, my dear,' he had said, in one of the discussions about ways and means which had followed his return to the peaceful home-life at Bruges, 'it really was an immense relief our getting hold of such a lot of hard cash for poor old Hexham. It puts us and our credit in such a different position from what it has been for years.'

'I daresay it has, but I don't want any more credit, if you please—we have had more than was good for us all along. What sort of people are they? I suppose the girls are good-looking?

That's what *you* mean by crediting them with all the virtues.'

'They certainly are; but it's very unfair of you to talk in that jealous way. If you saw Mrs. Banneret, not to mention her husband and the sons.'

'Oh, there are sons, then?'

'Yes, very fine young fellows; one of them rowed three in the Cambridge eight this year—which beat your favourite Oxford crew, my lady. They're handsome too.'

'Well, I can't be jealous of *them*, can I?'

'No, nor of any girl or woman alive, as you well know—say you know it, dear, won't you? You're only trying to draw me?'

'I suppose I must forgive you, as usual, though you've stayed away an unconscionable time, and spent more money in London than you ought to have done—now haven't you?'

'I had to complete arrangements—and—er—er—there were business details. Hang it! if a man can't have a little amusement when he gets a cheque for a couple of hundred thousand, after being mewed up in a place like this for years, when is he to have it? And the old clubs were so pleasant, and the fellows so glad to see me again, y'know!'

'Oh yes, I know! And ready to play bridge and billiards, no doubt. So you think I'd like to pay Mrs. What's-her-name a visit, and see the old place again? Perhaps it would be rather a lark.'

'Don't be reckless, dear! That's not your line, but *if* you could manage it, some day, when

the girls are at their pensions, I guarantee that you'd enjoy it. It would please them awfully—and *me*, if that counts.'

'Well, perhaps I'll see about it—but don't be sure just yet.'

CHAPTER XVI

Among the entertainments proper to the season, which the family about this time witnessed, was the polo match in the Champion Cup Tournament between the 'Magpies' and the 'Handley Cross' teams.

The former team was composed of Captain Hobson, Major Vaughan, Mr. Thynne, and Major Lee; the latter played Mr. Rich, Major Anselm, Captain Neil Haig, and Colonel Renton; Colonel St. Quintin, timekeeper, and Mr. John Watson and Major Kirke, umpires.

The girls were wildly interested, having seen Captain Neil Haig (who put in the first big hit) play in Melbourne.

On that occasion, four Englishmen played the best team in Australia, composed of the three brothers Camperdown and Mr. Wellesley. It came off on the Moonee Valley ground; it was a notable society function—Her Excellency Lady Brassey, the wife of the Governor of the day, presenting the prizes on the ground.

It was stubbornly contested, but ended in a draw; Colonel St. Quintin, who happened to be in Australia at the time, acted as umpire.

So much interested in the game were they, so lost in admiration of the beauty and high quality of the ponies, that, hearing there were to be two club games played at Hurlingham on the following Wednesday, they arranged to attend. To their surprise and delight Lord Roberts and Lady Aileen arrived to witness the play.

Lord Harrington's team consisted of the Duke of Westminster, Captain Neil Haig, his Lordship himself, and Mr. de Kooep. A close finish, with a draw, was the result. The day was lovely, the play admirable, but one feature of the meeting particularly interested the Australian contingent. Vanda, whose eyes seemed to be everywhere, exclaimed suddenly: 'Why, there's our West Australian friend Gerald Branksome; and, just fancy! it must be his wife with him. We heard he was to be married this month, in London, to the daughter of a high official in Albany, or Perth, or somewhere. How pretty she is—so well dressed too! What fun meeting them here! Don't you see them, Hermie? What a swell Gerald looks—tall hat—frocker—most accurate!'

The pair of spectators thus favourably reviewed were seen to be in conversation with Captain Haig, after which, the recent bridegroom retired into the recesses of the dressing pavilion, whence he shortly emerged in full polo costume, a few minutes before the Victoria Cross Race was started. A tall, well-built, fair-haired young man, he slipped into the saddle on a club pony, led out for him, with the ease of a practised performer, after care-

fully altering the stirrup leathers. The game included dismounting, and lifting to the saddle a dummy, presumably a wounded comrade, and afterwards clearing the hurdles on the course—a feat requiring more than average strength, activity, and horsemanship. This feat was performed at least once, during the late Boer War, by a member of a New South Wales contingent. He deliberately returned under fire for the purpose—the feat taking place during a very hot encounter with the Boers, who had ambushed a scouting party. The leaden hail was so close and deadly that the clothes of the rescuer and his comrade were riddled. Neither was seriously injured, but the poor 'Waler' who gamely carried his riders out of danger received his death wound. The Australian—for such he was—was accorded the rare and precious, almost unique, decoration of the 'Queen's Scarf.'

There were no bullets flying during the more peaceful contest which the club's courtesy provided for the guest from a far country, none the less was there need of a strong arm and exceptional horsemanship. He was apparently no novice, inasmuch as, after dismounting and remounting with enviable activity, he finally won on the post, to the great joy and pride of his wife, and those friends who hailed from the gold-strewn lands under the Southern Cross. The President congratulated him in the handsomest manner, requesting his Australian address, in order that the prize for the race, which would be forwarded, might reach him safely.

So the Hurlingham expedition closed in a manner equally pleasing to the champion of Australian horsemanship and his compatriots. They went home together and heard all about the wedding, 'in the merry month of May,' and the honeymoon cottage on the river, where the nightingale sang to sympathetic listeners, and recalled Heine's delicious poem. Nothing would satisfy the Bannerets but a 'sacred promise,' as Vanda called it, that they should stay for a week at Hexham when they returned from Paris, for which city of delights they were leaving on the morrow.

After such feats of horsemanship the youthful division became clamorous for half a dozen hunters, as the stable quad. (Eric said) was disgracefully empty. What were *one* pair of carriage horses, another of ponies for their mother's phaeton, the governor's park hack, and one or two others? The hackney was a darling for beauty and manners, though the pater persisted in saying that in pace, elasticity, endurance—in fact, as an all-round horse—he was not a patch upon the famous Gaucho, or Graysteel, which he rode in his youth in Australia. He admitted that Count D'Orsay walked fast, cantered easily, trotted fairly, and, like his namesake and Private Willis, was very generally admired. No fault could be found with his manners and appearance. But where would he be at the end of a seventy-mile ride, which old Graysteel had several times performed, off *grass*, with ease to himself and comfort to his rider. Besides, he did *not* believe in hackney blood. They were very sweet to look at—perfect

almost in shape, carriage, and other requisites for ornamental equitation.

But there was a 'want' somewhere: he doubted if they could jump; he questioned if they could stay; and, it was a hard thing to state, but after you got away from the slow paces he was afraid they were even *rough*—one 'perfect' animal that he tried certainly was so. In a slow, rocking-horse sort of canter he was tolerable, but after that he lifted you almost out of the saddle at every stride.

'Come, I say, sir!' said Reggie; 'you mustn't begin crabbing the horses of your ancestral home, and all that, before you've been a year in England —sounds provincial, doesn't it? It takes time, as you have often said, to pick up a first-class hackney anywhere. Give the old country time, and you'll get hold of a covert hack or two that will put these old favourites out of your head.'

'That there are plenty of good goers to be had here I never denied,' he said, with a musing expression, 'but when I think of Hope, The Gaucho, and Graysteel, none of them can do *that*. You boys were too young to recollect the horses I rode and drove when your mother and I were living on our western cattle station, or visiting the sheep-run in Riverina.'

'Oh, tell us about them—now do!' coaxed Vanda, seating herself promptly on the floor, and leaning against her indulgent parent's knee. 'Mother rode, and drove, then—didn't she?'

'Yes, indeed! she was a bold horsewoman, a good whip too. Absolutely fearless—so much so

that I often anticipated her coming to grief. However, she never did. So she must have been clever or lucky, above the average.'

'Now then, sir, about the horses? How were they bred, and what could they do?'

'Well, they were chiefly compounded of English thorough-bred and high-caste blood, middle-sized, but fast, hardy, tireless, and sure-footed to a marvellous degree. The two best all-round hacks I ever owned were Hope and The Gaucho. The latter, the show horse of the stud, was the offspring of a South American mare, imported from Valparaiso in early colonial days. Your respected father was a trifle more active then, and used to break in his own colts.'

'Is that why all Walers buck-jump, as people say?' suggested Eric.

'Perfect nonsense!' returned the senior, slightly 'drawn.' 'Of the dozen and a half colts which I broke to saddle—single and double harness, and to carry a lady—hardly one but was as well mannered as any horse in the Row, besides having various accomplishments which English horses could never dream of.'

'What sort were they?'

'Travelling over rough, stony country by night as well as day, besides those of the Australian camp horse or "cutter out." These include coolness and courage, when ridden through a drove of a thousand excited cattle, keeping close up to a sharp-horned savage, shoulder against shoulder, or following up, the rider's stockwhip making hair and hide fly; racing neck and neck

for one minute, and perhaps the next stopping dead and wheeling within his own tracks, to block a sudden break back to the herd,—this violent exercise kept up from sunrise to sunset, with perhaps a trifle of a dozen miles extra before the station yards are reached. The "cutting out" work, or separation of fat or strange animals from the general herd, collected on camp, is not very unlike polo—except that a second horse is rarely used either by squatter or stockrider.'

'How long did the "breaking" and "making" business take?' demanded Eric.

'Truth to tell, it was short work, and rather rough. As two-year-olds the colts were roped, and handled unceremoniously, after the bush fashion of the day.'

> 'Wild as the wild deer, and untamed;
> By spur and saddle undefiled,'

quoted Reggie. 'You must have had an exciting time, sir.'

'By no means; full as they were of pluck, they were hereditarily free from vice. Before the end of the first week I rode one colt thirty miles, alone and unattended. He was perfectly quiet, and jumped logs like an old horse; the other was much the same—free and temperate.'

'But your groom helped you, and the stabling counts for something?'

'There was no groom, neither any stable. They were kept in the yard, with the surcingle and mouthing-bit on by day, and paddocked by night —grass and water *à discrétion*.'

'And what was the outcome of this cow-boy treatment?'

'They turned out accomplished hackneys. Quiet in saddle and harness, and carried a lady—as per advertisement.'

'Oh, how nice!' said Vanda; 'what colour?'

'Bright bay, with black points. Graysteel excepted.'

'What about paces?'

'Fast and good, remarkable trotters, but if touched on the curb would lead off on the right foot at an easy canter. Hope walked fast, but The Gaucho could never be got to do so, though I tried him for hours and days patiently. His dam, the Chileno mare, an animal of great courage and endurance, had the same failing. But like his half-brother, Hope, he could jump his own height, was absolutely incapable of falling, and had been ridden eighty miles between "sun and sun" more than once. He, too, was quiet and staunch in harness.'

'Think they'd do in the Market Harborough country?' queried Reggie doubtfully.

'Of course; brooks and trappy enclosures would be a novelty, but they were clever, and would soon come to know their way about. Rails they preferred, the stiffer the better. Walls, being straightforward obstacles, they rather liked. And with twelve stone up I shouldn't fear their being in the first flight. Hope won a steeplechase, over stiff post and rail country, against a strong field, and another half-brother, Maythorn, a son of The Premier, imported—sold to a hard-

riding friend. Morton Gray, of Gray Court, gave a lead to the Master of the Melbourne Hounds, the well-known George Wharton, over the Bootles gap, a stiff four-railer, with a "cap" on top, bringing up the height to nearly five feet, and finished a long day's run without "putting a toe" on rail or wall. He was a fine hackney also; and, as a camp horse, a great performer. These horses were reared in the Western district of Victoria, then, as now, admitted to be, for soil, climate, and pasturage, unequalled in Australia. And now I think we have "talked horse" enough for the present.'

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The important question of buying a few hunters had been decided. Now was the time to buy, before the hunting season set in. Mr. Banneret very properly considered that the best animals were the cheapest in the end; and there was no occasion to economise, the safety of his children being the principal consideration. A sale of hunters taking place at Tattersall's in a few days, he secured a few really good ones to begin with. First and foremost, The Marchioness, a wonderful brown mare, for 350 guineas—rather extravagant, paterfamilias could not help thinking, but the recollection of his last bank-balance hardened his heart. She would set Hermione off, who had fine hands and seat; and as she was a front ranker with the Quorn, with faultless manners, and declared perfectly sound by two eminent vets., the cheque was handed over. Vanda was provided with the Admiral, at £180—an extremely safe,

strong, experienced hunter, that 'you couldn't throw down.' 'Just the thing for a young lady as was doing her first season,' the stud groom said; 'only wanted lettin' alone, and trustin' to his discretion, like.' He under-rated Vanda's abilities, however, as succeeding seasons were to demonstrate. The boys got one apiece; paterfamilias a couple—one of which Mrs. Banneret could ride on occasion, when she went to see a throw off. Their united values totted up to a sum which caused Mr. Banneret to give a low whistle, accustomed as he had become to his personal liability for fabulous amounts lately. 'I wonder what I should have thought of such a purchase in old times?' passed through his mind. 'However, everything is comparative; when I gave a cheque for ten thousand for the first payment in the Bundawarra station, I thought it was an investment that required careful management and some good luck to carry through. But I little thought I should ever draw one for two hundred thousand odds, which the Hexham estate comes to—what the upkeep of it will cost is for the future to proclaim. However, I see the last accounts from West Australia show the month's "clean up" to be a hundred and seventy thousand fine ounces, worth best part of a million sterling, with the reef growing wider and richer as it goes down. However, it seems nothing like so good as some of these Rand mines in South Africa. We live and learn. Let us hope these young people of ours will estimate their pecuniary position at its proper value. Their early education has certainly tended to that end.

The stud seems growing fast; however, there is plenty of room. They say the stables were commenced on this grand scale by the present Earl's grandfather, and were left unfinished for forty years. He had a lucky win on the turf, and made haste to utilise it by completing the main building, where the clock-tower stands. Had he only known! But of how many men—even nations—may not that be said! Some day, perhaps, a classic-quoting critic may fire off *de te fabula narratur* at some member of the Banneret family, now so high above the arrows of fate!'

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Summer in England! What an idyllic season it was. Now these young people from a far country began to realise the immense, the incalculable superiority of a land with a thousand years of history behind it! Think of it—dwell on it—try to grasp the immeasurable distinction of belonging to such a kingdom, if not born within its sea-bordered, sheltered bounds! Consider the inviolate sea! Behold the land where no foe has set unconquered foot since great Alfred drove Dane and Norseman far from her cliffs and beaches. The land where nobles and commoners, alike resentful of tyranny, refused to wait till constitutional resistance ripened into rebellion, but stood strong, patient, though menacing, till an overawed tyrant signed the great Charter of Runnymede, which for all time gave pledge and assurance of that justice never more to be delayed or bartered to the commons of England; not alone to them, but to the states, possessions, nations

planted by her hand, and, except by their own act and deed, secure of that priceless heritage for all time.

How they enjoyed, how they admired and appreciated, all the feelings so characteristic of home life of which they had read and heard about since earliest childhood. The corn, the hayfields, with harvesters, gleaners, and nut-brown maids—wondering at the abundance of female labour, so unusual in the colonies, where women are too scarce and valuable to do field or dairy work for employers outside of the family circle. 'Oh, the greenery of England! words cannot describe it!' as an Australian lady exclaimed during her first summer in the ancestral home. 'The delicious shadowy woodland, where, if the season be propitious, there comes not any wind or rain, where the green turf is a velvet carpet, flower-bespangled like an oriental purdah. Where the wood-rose and eglantine, daffodil and primrose, violet and woodbine, grace each cottage home!'

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The greater number of the amusements and occupations proper to the summer time had been availed of and thoroughly enjoyed, when word came from Bruges that Lady Hexham had decided to accept Mrs. Banneret's kind invitation to spend a fortnight with her at Hexham Hall. It would fit in with her arrangements (she said) inasmuch as she was coming over with her daughter, who was to stay on a visit to a relative for the remainder of the season, as their doctor believed a change would be beneficial. She would like to see her old home

again, and Lord Hexham would remain in charge of the family while she was absent.

The missive was answered promptly, to the effect that Mrs. Banneret would be charmed to receive the Countess, and trusted that she would make Hexham her home as long as it suited her to remain in England, and would by no means confine her visit to the term mentioned. Great was the excitement which prevailed in the village of Hexham (the news having leaked out through some of the retainers still in service at the Hall) when the carriage and waggonette drove up to the station, and Lady Hexham, with her daughter and maid, descended. They were met and warmly welcomed by Mrs. Banneret and Hermione, but before they could reach the carriage there was a perfect rush to intercept them, headed by superannuated retainers still resident in the village, who begged, some indeed with tears, to be permitted to pay 'their respects,' as they expressed it, to their former mistress and her daughter. It was touching to witness the deep feeling of these survivals of a long-past feudal era. They were not permitted to kneel, but it was seen how much in accordance with their feelings this act of homage would have been.

'Oh, milady! oh, milady!' exclaimed the aged ex-gardener and his wife, in chorus with an infirm stable-helper, a keeper with one arm, and a deaf laundress. 'What a mercy that ever we should ha' lived to see your Ladyship and Miss Corisande. The Lord above be thanked for it, and bless His holy name!'

Lady Hexham had been a proud woman, and bore herself so even yet, through all the years of her comparative poverty; but the tears filled her eyes as she saw the servitors of their former state and grandeur make lowly obeisance before her.

'Well, Benson? How d'ye do, Markham? Glad to see you all looking so well—and Peggy, and Mrs. Turton, too. I must come and see you in a day or two—I was afraid I should find some of you in the poorhouse.'

'Yes, milady,' said an ancient dame, whose gnarled weather-worn features betokened the octogenarian, 'and so we should ha' been, only for Madam here, and Muster Banneret; they wouldn't let none on us go as 'ad bin old servants at the Hall. They found us work about the place—same as we'd bin used to.'

'Perhaps you wouldn't object, Lady Hexham, to their coming up to-morrow,' interposed her hostess, 'when they can have some bread and cheese and beer. You will then be able to hear about their affairs at your leisure. Come up to the Hall, Benson, at twelve o'clock, and bring any of the old servants with you. Tell them Lady Hexham would like to see them.'

Lady Hexham bowed without speaking—the words would not come; the sharp contrast between the new and the old regime had so powerfully affected her that she was unable to say what she intended.

The drive, short though it might be, was still impressive, and doubtless awakened older memories as they passed underneath the shadowy oaks, and

marked the sun-rays glittering through the leaves of the great chestnuts of the avenue. For the rest, everything was as trim and well ordered as hands could make it. That perfect neatness of gravel and grass, flower-bed and foliage, which, in England, speaks of the abundant cheapness of skilled labour in that particular department, was combined with the most tasteful arrangement of lawn and grove and woodland, in broad effects of light and shade.

'Banneret had ridden over to a neighbouring estate, but would join them at dinner,' his wife said.

Meanwhile Miss Corisande was received by Hermione and Vanda, by whom she was carried off to her room, and duly placed in charge of a personal attendant.

'We hope you will make yourself at home, in every sense of the word,' said Hermione. 'We feel like base usurpers. But I daresay we shall get over the feeling by degrees; you must try and do the same. In your case it will take rather longer, I fear.'

'Don't alarm yourself about that,' replied the Honourable Corisande, who did not seem inclined to dwell upon the sentimental side of the affair. 'I was too young to care much when we left the old Hall for good; indeed, I side with Dad, and vote it a jolly good thing that he'd been able to work off the encumbered estate so well. We look upon your father as our benefactor, I can tell you.'

'That's very sweet of you, I'm sure,' said Vanda. 'I know we shall be great friends directly.

Are you fond of riding? We've got a few decent horses together, and hope to have more.'

'Passionately; but, of course, I haven't had much practice. There are none to speak of in Bruges. The English inhabitants are decayed gentlefolk like ourselves, and the horses belong to the canal boats mostly. It's not half a bad old place, though—music and languages cheap, so it suits us down to the ground. We were very young then, whereas now'—and here the speaker cast a half-admiring, half-regretful glance around—'we should enjoy a change now and then.'

'In that case, perhaps you'd like a canter to-morrow after lunch? Hermione will lend you her horse, which is quite "well-mannered," as English people say. Mine is rather "touchy," which is Australian for nervous. Hermione's habit will fit you, I think.'

This arrangement was carried out successfully. The girls went off, with a groom behind, 'accoutred proper,' ready to open gates or perform any service required. Hermione's palfrey went smoothly and pleasantly, conducting himself to the entire satisfaction of the Honourable Corisande, who said she had no idea she could ride so well. The fact being, that she had plenty of nerve, and got on very well, having had an early experience of ponies—which indeed, from their sudden stoppages and occasional liability to kick, are by no means to be despised as a preparatory riding-school. So all was peace and joy when the girls returned. Lady Hexham had paid a visit to an old friend, to whom she had taken the opportunity to express

her opinion of Mrs. Banneret and her daughters—entirely favourable, at the same time hinting that she had not expected quite such refined taste or good manners.

'You know, my dear Kate, we are not accustomed to associate such qualities with wealthy colonists; and those fools of novelists persist in describing every one who makes money or a career out of England as either a vulgarian or a German Jew. We ought to know better, certainly, as every one's younger sons or brothers have been going to Australia and New Zealand for generations. Why they should necessarily turn into clowns or roughs is hard to imagine, if we only took the trouble to think. But that's the last thing English people do. We take everything for granted. I am enchanted with our successors, and quite endorse what Hexham says of them.'

'And what did he say?'

'Simply, that the family resembled English gentlefolk, all over the world. That, short of giving the old place back to us, there was nothing they wouldn't do. So it's our fault if they are not our very good friends henceforth.'

So the neighbours parted, Lady Hexham well pleased to have renewed an old friendship under such reassuring conditions. And when, after returning to the Hall, the master of the house met them at dinner, the *entente cordiale* became so advanced that the Bannerets might have been taken for the long-lost relations, returned from foreign parts, laden with the gold and jewels which *used to* reward those who dared the dangers of

the sea, the hazards of fever and war, in some far eastern kingdom, where grew the pagoda tree.

The evening, following a fatiguing day, was spent restfully—a little music, with more interchange of girlish experiences. For the guests an early retirement, although Corisande did not leave Vanda's room for a 'good hour,' as the maid alleged, after she had been dismissed.

However, the three girls were up early, and, after a stroll through the shrubberies, quite ready for breakfast.

Though Lady Hexham had only intended to stay for a week, and was, in a general way, unused to changing her plans, she consented to remain for a fortnight, at the urgent request of the Banneret girls, who declared that they would be desolated if Corisande was torn from them before their garden party came off. This exceptional entertainment—which, indeed, had been decided upon long before the visit of the Hexhams came into view—was to be on a scale of grandeur such as had not been known in the county since the days of the grandfather of the present Earl, whose extravagant tastes and lavish expenditure had caused the financial ruin of the family. Gradually Lady Hexham seemed to weaken in her opposition to the idea, and lastly decided, after the receipt of a letter from her husband, that she really could not be so ungracious as to refuse an invitation so kindly made, so warmly pressed. Lastly, the great outwork having given way, the last entrenchment yielded. Lord Hexham stated his intention of bringing over his youngest daughter, who

had been included in the earlier invitation, and sending her by rail from London. For himself —no! He was sincerely grateful for the great kindness shown to his wife and daughters, but he would prefer to pay a visit later in the season. And from this resolve he could not be moved.

CHAPTER XVII

However, this concession was all that could be expected for the present. It was more liberal, indeed, as Corisande confided to her new friends, than she had hoped for, until the last moment.

Vanda was overjoyed at the idea of having a new friend more nearly of her own age, and declared that nothing was now wanting to ensure her perfect happiness. Australian friends would be forthcoming to complete the house-party. If the weather was reasonable, the Hexham Hall gathering would be one of the glories of the summer. Why, indeed, should it not be a triumphant success?

The day—the great day—was fine. Such a glowing morn, tempered, as the sun-dial advanced towards mid-day, with the deliciously modified shade of groves which in olden days had seen the 'green gloom' of their depths invaded by the gleam of knightly armour. The Banneret girls, who had become accustomed to the sumptuous leafage of the English woodlands, were not so demonstrative as in their first experience.

But to Corisande, retaining only a dim, half-

childish memory, it was a revelation as of a new heaven, a new earth. The immense girth of bole, the enormous spread of branch of the oaks, in the 'King's Chase,' amazed her. There, indeed, the legend ran, had 'bluff King Hal' in person followed the deer. Here, beneath these leafy shades, had he feasted with nobles, courtiers, and ladies fair. In fancy's ear, with cry of hound and huntsman's hollo, the gay greenwood rang and re-echoed. What joyous days were those! she thought. How much more colour and light than in this sad-coloured, prosaic age!

This, in their hours of idleness, the young people were prone to imagine, and, indeed, to assert, in hasty generalisation, untempered by experience. On calmer retrospect they were, however, compelled to admit that, in larger outlook, variety of occupation, and the wondrous advance of scientific discovery, the moderns have immeasurably the best of it. If the age no longer affords such romantic situations as when

> The Knight looked down from the Paynim Tower,
> As a Christian Host, in its pride and power,
> Through the pass beneath him wound,

we must admit that the captive with his 'heavy chain' despaired of release by those 'whom he loved with a brother's heart, those in whose wars he had borne a part, who had left him there to die.'

> Sound again, clarion! clarion, pour thy blast!
> Sound! for the captive's dream of hope is past.

'Can imagination depict a situation more hopeless, more deplorable?' remarked Reggie, who now, reading for his 'double first,' thought himself constrained to take the rational side of the argument.

'I think Sterne's prisoner is a close parallel,' argued Eric. 'What a picture it is!'

'But perhaps he had never been a knight,' suggested Vanda, 'so he would not have had a past of gallant strife, with helm and charger and nodding plume, to look back upon; perhaps not even a victory in the lists, like Wilfred of Ivanhoe, with his opponent rolling in the sand, and his ladye-love, amid the beauty and fashion (smart set of the period) looking on. Would that have comforted him in his dungeon, or otherwise, do you think?'

'Rather hard to say. Who is the true heroine of that delightful novel *Ivanhoe*?—as the lists of Ashby-de-la-Zouche are referred to.'

'Rebecca, of course! Thackeray, in his inimitable ending of the novel, absolutely destroys Rowena, who settled down as a worthy mate for the doltish Athelstane.'

'*Now*, look here, Reggie!' said Eric impressively; 'if once we get fairly started on Sir Walter, we shall never get to the garden party, or the great Hexham Hall revels, or, indeed, anywhere else in the kingdom of fact and practical politics. Hadn't we all better "split and squander," as they used to do in the old Border days, when they had managed some particularly lawless deed of murder and rapine? We shall have my mother

reading the Riot Act (which she can do on occasions, mild as she looks). I wouldn't presume to dictate to Miss Aylmer, as an honoured guest, entitled to respectful deference, but would merely suggest that an adjournment to the scene of action, as volunteers for the duties of preparation, would be safer for her—indeed, for all of *us*.'

'Come with me, Corie,' said Vanda. 'Hermie and I will protect you ; and, indeed, there is some sense in what Eric says—rarely as it happens to be the case.'

They were just in time to be detailed for active service. Of course the caterer-general had organised his forces, and was directing the movements of his officers, not to mention the rank and file, of whom there appeared to be hundreds. Still, it was necessary to have aides-de-camp and attachés between the controlling powers and the heads of departments, and for this important service the young people—eager, intelligent, and alert — answered admirably. To be sure, they had additional assistance, which could hardly be overestimated. This contingent had arrived by train while they had been discussing literary questions, and had at once been requisitioned by Mrs. Banneret. Captain the Honourable Jack Aylmer, of the Guards, the eldest son, heir to the title and lordship of Hexham, if but to little else, was a steady, hard-working young officer, devoted to his profession, who had been wounded in South Africa, and had gained the proud privilege of having had the D.S.O. decoration attached to his uniform by His Majesty King Edward in person,

the while Lord Roberts looked on approvingly. The sailor brother, Lieutenant the Honourable Falkland Aylmer, whose ship the *Palmyra* had happened to get over from Malta about that time, dashed into action at once, and proved himself to be the right man in the right place. Who does not know how the 'handy man' can multiply his inventive talents, and communicate his mesmeric quality at pinch of need? So when, on that wondrous morning, the mid-summer sun, all goldenly defiant of meadow mists and woodland shadows, irradiated the scene, Hermione, Vanda, and their young friends were satisfied, even exultant, though occasionally tremulous lest anything important had been overlooked.

But as the programme had been considered and debated, submitted to the host and hostess over and over again, there was little risk of such mischance occurring.

Twelve o'clock had been mentioned as the hour when the sports would begin, but long before mid-day all entrances to the park were crowded with a continuous stream of country people. As they arrived, they were taken in charge by the land steward and persons in authority under him, who disposed them in groups, so that they should diverge to different localities in the park and chase. There, under the shade of immemorial elms and oaks, might they rest and recreate after the long walk which, no doubt, many of them had taken.

Every kind of game, with due forethought, had been arranged for, and prizes made ready for

proficiency in those rustic sports, to excel in which, since earliest Saxon days, had been the pride of rural England. Running and leaping, wrestling, cricket, single-stick, and football were all duly provided for. Scores of athletic youths contested eagerly. The adjudging of the prizes gave general satisfaction, while their unusual quality and value elicited hearty praise.

For the village lasses, similar contests and excitements were not wanting. These were of a gentler kind, tending to improvement in the domestic arts : needlework in all its branches, as expressed in the making and repairing of garments for children and others of the household. For girls under fourteen, and those under sixteen, foot races were got up, which tested the pace and staying power of the younger damsels. These had always been popular contests, and could not have been omitted from the programme without causing dissatisfaction. Skipping, rounders, and hockey were not neglected, though at this last exercise occasional falls provoked the mirth of the bystanders, and a black eye or two, with other bruises, bore witness to the earnestness of the competing sides. The young men rode at the quintain, wrestled, boxed, pole-jumped, and tent-pegged, played at bowls, and revived the ancient game of quarter-staff. Last, not least, the prize for archery, a handsome and valuable one, aroused such feelings of emulation in the Dianas of the Hexham and West Essex Clubs as had not been known since the celebrated match which Lady Hexham recalled, in the days of her youth, when she was a noted

performer, and princes and nobles contended for the honour of collecting her arrows. To conclude the day's entertainment there were hack and pony races, hurdles and steeplechases. These last, Australian innovations, were, however, modified by restriction of the men and horses to the families of tenants on the estate who took an interest in the nearest pack of hounds, and found it pay to school a promising four-year-old, likely to bring a good price at the beginning of the next season.

The invitation committee had extended the list over a fairly wide social range. Besides the squirearchy of the county and the neighbouring gentry, the farmers and tradespeople, the tenants with their families, and their visitors too, came as a matter of right. There was room, and a welcome for all. It was hoped that no one who had worked in the fields, or on the grounds of Hexham, would stay away. And judging from the continuous march of people on foot and horseback, in tax-carts, dog-carts, gigs, and waggons, very few did.

Soon after mid-day the immense tables, placed on tressels, were covered, as if by magic, with viands of every sort, kind, and description, arranged ready for the speedy consumption which it was correctly assumed would take place. Products of the home farm and many others were displayed, replaced, and continuously provided, in never-ending profusion. Beer flowed as if from a fountain. The roast beef of Old England in barons and sirloins, fish and fowl, mutton and lamb, pork

and veal, puddings and pies, fruit, cakes,—all these and more were assiduously furnished for the banquet of which all present were pressed and encouraged to partake.

While the rural contingent was judiciously dispersed and subdivided, so as to prevent the assemblage of an unwieldy crowd, it had been necessary, in the interest of settled order and good government, to invite a selection of the leading families of this and adjacent counties, to head the entertainment. The Duke of Dorlingham had graciously honoured his invitation, while earls and barons, with a proportion of baronets and long-descended country gentlemen, responded cordially, so that the great marquee, erected some days previously, under the personal supervision of a transatlantic firm of caterers, well known in London, Brighton, and Australia, was filled with an assemblage of aristocratic personages, from whose ranks but few individuals of distinction in the county were absent.

The accessories left little to be desired. The cuisine was undeniable ; the waiting service at table was as nearly perfect as could be accomplished at an *al fresco* entertainment ; the wines were admittedly beyond criticism. The turf around the temporary structure was in perfect condition ; the branches of the great oaks waved banner-like above the festive concourse :

> The self-same shadows flecked the sward
> In the days of good Queen Anne ;

while within the enormous canvas walls, genuine

enjoyment and tempered hilarity commenced with the popping of the first champagne cork, nor waned until the call for silence preceded that loyal toast never absent from any festal function of importance in Britain or her Colonies.

Then the Duke of Dorlingham rose in his place at the head of the principal table. On his right sat Arnold Banneret, on his left the Honourable Corisande Aylmer, flushed with the consciousness of youth and beauty, heightened by the possession of an exalted position and acknowledged distinction. The Duke had whispered his congratulations to Corisande on their return to England under circumstances, he trusted he might say, favourable to the future fortunes of his old friend's family.

'Indeed, your Grace,' said the girl, 'I don't think we could have had a happier return to Hexham short of the dear old place being given back to us. It is quite a fairy tale, and Mr. and Mrs. Banneret are the angels of the story.'

'I feel ready to believe it, my dear Corisande, and I hope when you come to Dorlingham with your new friends to hear all about it. I trust that Lady Hexham, whom I must see before I go, is quite well? But these good folks have nearly finished cheering, so I must begin my speech.'

'He had always,' his Grace said, 'been in sincere sympathy with those daring adventurers who, following in the wake of Drake and Raleigh, Frobisher and Oxenham, had done so much for the glory and expansion of England. His friend's grandfather, finding the limits of our island home

insufficient, had sailed away in his own galley, a modern Viking, across the Pacific Ocean, to the wider, unshared, half-unknown lands under the Southern Cross, so late discovered, so rich in promise. A voyager over uncharted seas, amid hostile tribes, he had faced dangers, had encountered strange adventures, upon which he would not at present dwell. It would suffice to say that he found there, what he went so far to seek — a noble appanage to the Empire. (Cheers.) A land where millions of British-born and British-descended people were now living in peace, in comfort, and comparative affluence, under conditions such as Englishmen had always demanded for themselves and their families : conditions of equal laws, of well-paid industries—in circumstances, too, giving hope of a still more prosperous future. Their host, after securing an auriferous property of exceptional richness, had decided to come "home," as Australians wherever settled still called Old England, in order to invest a portion of his capital in the purchase of an English estate. Such returning colonists, he had always held, were of the greatest possible advantage to the mother-country—not to one class alone, but to all classes—by the employment of labour, the circulation of capital, and, possibly, by the introduction of new ideas. Men like their host, representative of Newer Englands and Greater Britains beyond the seas, had helped to build great cities and add vast tracts of fertile land to her ancient sovereignty—to her newly consolidated Empire. They increased year by year the volume of her

trade and commerce, so world-wide and far-stretching, the foundation on which so much of England's "might, majesty, and dominion" rested.

'They might judge by what they had seen and enjoyed to-day, of what value to the old country men like their worthy host were likely to be. He would not weary them. He was not a man of words, but his friends knew that what he said, he meant. His heart was in the toast which he gave them; there was no need to ask them to drink it with all the honours—their worthy host and hostess, with their amiable family and friends' (here he looked paternally at Corisande), 'and long life to them, to enjoy what they have so honourably gained, so liberally used.'

Arnold Banneret stood up in his place and faced the great assemblage. He looked around for a few seconds, permitting the applause which had followed the Duke's peroration to die down. He met his wife's gaze, half-proud, half-overcome by mingled feelings. He read the expression on her countenance, with the tear which dimmed her eye but did not fall. He knew that she was recalling the days of hard endeavour—the doubts at times, almost the despair, which had clouded early days in their chequered life, and now as he stood there, with plaudits resounding in his honour, his heart swelled high with natural pride and satisfaction.

'My Lord Duke, ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'it would be insincere for me to deny that I feel intensely the compliment, I may say the honour,

paid me by his Grace and this distinguished and representative assemblage.

'That the work is hard, the privations severe, in the pioneer's life may not be denied; but the difficulties, though grave, are not greater than thousands of Britons have been willing to encounter in the pursuit of fame and fortune, and, thank God! are still willing for such prizes to risk all that men hold dear. In the mysterious lottery of life there is no denying the presence of an element known as Chance, defying all calculation, and turning the balance to success or failure. "The race," as they all knew, "was not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." They had the warrant of Holy Writ for that. In his own experience he had seen it often exemplified. Of his comrades, one of the boldest explorers, one of the most capable pioneers of the Great West Australian desert, survived but to fall a victim in later years to the arrow of a Nigerian savage; another not less dauntless, and, in time of need, patient of hunger, thirst, and all but the direst extremity of famine, a master of woodcraft—ever tireless, cheerful, and inventive, lay beneath South African sands. But why dwell on failure or disaster—on history as old as humanity? He, by God's grace, had *not* failed, but stood there to-day—not proud, not vainglorious, but grateful to the bottom of his heart for that Divine mercy which had shielded him in danger and distress, in the dreary days when he lay under the shadow of death. And, next to the interposition of Divine Providence, was he indebted to the lady who sat by Sir Piers Hazel-

wood, his dear, constant, faithful wife, who had nursed him in sickness, cheered him in misfortune, and been bravest and most steadfast in the darkest hour before dawn. (Continuous cheering.) He would say, in conclusion, that he recognised the exceptional good fortune which had come to him, less for his personal advantage, than for the power it gave of benefiting his fellow-creatures, and relieving those less fortunately circumstanced.' (Tremendous cheering.)

Other toasts were given—other speeches made. Due honour was paid to Lady Hexham, by personal friends and acquaintances of the family, many of whom had come far to greet her. She was visibly affected, and though actuated naturally by conflicting feelings, declared to Mrs. Banneret that she never expected to feel so happy again. As for Hermione and Vanda, they kept assuring their mother that they quite realised all 'the claims of long descent,' and couldn't think of letting Corisande go back to Bruges. Mrs. Banneret was quite willing to adopt her; Eric and Reggie followed suit; and so, with more happy nonsense, 'God save the King' was struck up by the much-enduring band, and the great assemblage commenced to disperse, homewardly intent.

But the summer day in the Northern Isles is long—the twilight extends far into the night. There was a moon also; and the soft, warm mellow eve lingered, hour after hour, till the last departing revellers were safely lighted on their path. There was universal consensus of opinion—genuinely, if

variously, in some cases incongruously, expressed —that it was many a year since there had been the like of it at Hexham Hall; it was almost too good to be true that there would be another such meeting next year. 'Well, God bless Squire Banneret, anyhow!' was the benediction which mostly concluded the argument and assertions. The summer day was spent, indeed the lingering twilight had long invaded the scene, when the rear-guard of the great host of guests and revellers moved homeward, echoing in various forms of speech the common sentiment of grateful appreciation. The drags and carriages, phaetons and dog-carts, had rolled, and rattled, and rumbled along the high roads and lanes hours before, but still the rural visitors, chiefly on foot, thronged the pathways. Amid the confused murmur of voices the dominant note of assent was the declaration that the county had never seen such a treat before, so thoroughly carried out in every detail, and that if, as was promised, such an entertainment would be annual, the tenants and humbler neighbours would have indeed cause to bless the day when the Bannerets came among them.

As for the families, as represented by Lady Hexham, the Honourable Corisande and her brothers, together with Mr. and Mrs. Banneret, with their sons and daughters, there could not have been found a more harmonious *rapprochement* of the old order and the new. The girls were frankly, genuinely fond of one another by this time, a feeling which threatened to extend beyond the division of sex,—the Honourable

Falkland, who had recently been in command of a torpedo-destroyer, paying rather marked attention to Hermione, and Miss Corisande inclining to argumentative discussions with Reggie upon the relative advantages, or otherwise, of old and new countries. Nothing had advanced beyond the ordinary limits of friendliness; yet there were signs and tokens, recognised by keen observers, that such positions were, under favourable circumstances, capable of being permanently strengthened.

As for the seniors, they were resting from their labours after the exciting performance which had been successful beyond all expectation. A series of leisurely rambles through the, as yet, untraversed beauty spots of Britain had been considered as an autumnal engagement, in which Lady Hexham consented, after a vain attempt to stem the tide of opposition, as represented by the allied forces of untitled Hexham, to permit her daughter to join. They could not, even she admitted, hope to secure a more wise, experienced chaperon than Mrs. Banneret, not to mention Mr. Banneret, who had been lauded, in his magisterial capacity, for 'admirable firmness and discretion' under conditions scarcely differentiated indeed from those of civil war. This being the case, Lady Hexham gracefully assented, remarking that it appeared to her quite time to return to her husband, and the rest of the family, if she did not wish him to think her ashamed of their humble home at Bruges. This view of the case appeared so painful, that Corisande offered to return on the

spot, but the proposal lapsed in default of a seconder, or general moral support.

On the following day Lady Hexham left for home, previously assuring Mrs. Banneret that she had enjoyed her visit more than she could have possibly imagined, entirely through the kindness of Mrs. Banneret herself, and her family; she never thought that their years of exile could have ended with such a home-coming. It made amends in great measure for the sorrow caused by their ruin, and gave hope for the restoration of the family to its former position. Once it had appeared hopeless, but now, on account of the fortunate sale of the estate, and the unusual liberality of the purchaser, her most kind and generous husband, they had hope of returning to England in a few years, under brighter auspices. She asked her to believe that she was truly grateful, and bade God bless her in the future, and all belonging to her. So the ladies embraced and bade adieu; the one pleased to recognise a warm heart and kindly feelings under an apparently cold manner, and the other ready to uphold Australians as the most warm-hearted, delicate-minded, delightful people on the face of the earth.

. . . . . .

'All good things must come to an end,' says the venerable adage, and the Hexham Hall garden party was no exception to the ancient saw. The summer was now at its height, the next change would be a decadent one, after which the leaves would fall, and people begin to talk about autumn winds, declining days, and other depressing

subjects. Hence it was necessary to arrange for whatever plan of travel the family decided to carry out before winter was upon them, with its over-full programme of dances, dinners, hunting fixtures, and other absolutely necessary functions. The need for travel began to obtrude itself. Young men and maidens, with their attendant parents and guardians (for such indeed, nowadays, is the order in which the migration of families must be described), began to talk of guides, alpenstocks, and other foreign necessaries, the glories of the ascent of the Matterhorn, or the panorama from the Rigi.

However, after a full and exhaustive survey of plans and projects, the decision was practically unanimous in favour of Britain. So much had been dared and done during the present year, that it was agreed not to tempt the chances of foreign travel until a peaceful interval of restful rambles in the ancestral mother-land had made them fully conversant with all the scenes of interest, beauty, and historic fame, with the leading characteristics of which their reading had made them familiar.

The party of travel was to be commanded by Mr. and Mrs. Banneret: efficient, conventional chaperonage being, of course, indispensable. It was many years since the parents had enjoyed the opportunity of a quiet progress through historic scenes, which their general culture fitted them so eminently to enjoy. When they had the leisure, they had been without the pecuniary facilities, without which tourists are necessarily hampered.

Now they were in possession of both. They left Hexham, therefore, with the intention of enjoying to the fullest extent the fortunate combination, which comes so rarely in this troubled life of ours. The Hexham girls, titled and untitled, numbered three—Hermione, Corisande, and Vanda. Two of these were abbreviated to Corie and Hermie for the greater convenience of intimate friendly converse, Vanda pleading that her name was sufficiently short, and that 'Van' sounded rather Dutch. It was resolved to reserve this weighty matter for the test of experience and time.

But little time was wasted after the preliminaries were agreed upon. Something was said about following the route and the practice of some latter-day Canterbury pilgrims, and walking from London to that celebrated shrine. A party of Australian friends, not very dissimilar in number and artistic taste, had done so some years since, sending on their baggage by coach and rail to the terminus of each stage. But the elders of this party dissented from the proposition.

In the first place, it was unnecessarily fatiguing; also expensive in time. They had an extended tour to consider, and would find that, although they claimed to be over the average, as pedestrians, sufficient exercise would be provided before their return.

Moderate counsels prevailed, and though the younger division were eager for the Pilgrim's staff and Cockle-shell business, the rail and coach party carried its amendment. After this, what was to be the first objective? The Lakes—Windermere,

Grasmere, the Wordsworth country, Rydal Mount, and so on. Yes, decidedly.

They were fortunate in finding a decent hostelry near Grasmere, which served as a *pied à terre*, whence they could sally forth into the 'royaulme of faerye,' and revel in memories of the glorious dead. Here was the Poet's 'little nook of mountain ground,' overlooking the Lake of Grasmere. Here he lived for eight years, hither he brought his bride—

> The perfect woman, nobly planned
> To warn, to comfort, and command,

with whom he lived, in purest love and unclouded happiness, even unto his life's end.

The inn was not pretentious; there was no crowd of tourists to conduce to landlordly independence and the heightening of prices. But it was delicately clean; host and hostess were thankful for the patronage of such a company, and duly respectful. The view from their chamber windows was extensive and romantic, commanding a prospect of the vale of the Rothay and the distant waters of the Lake.

'Now that breakfast is over,' said Vanda—'and, oh! what a lovely sleep I had—and every one seems to have eaten enough to last till to-morrow morning, I vote that we lose no time, but get over to Rydal Mount the very first thing. Luckily the day is fine. I suppose we must walk?'

'Walk? Why, of course!' said Eric. 'You don't suppose we've come to this jolly Lake country, with views, and sunrises, and suchlike

floating all about, to be jolted in the shandrydan of the period? It will freshen us up after the riotous doings at Hexham, where we must have given our constitutions rather "a nasty bump," to say the least of it.'

'Don't talk in that horrid mundane way,' said Hermione, who was verging on the sentimental, semi-poetical period of life. 'There, yonder, is Rydal Mount on the side of the hill, "The modest house, yet covered with the Virginia creeper," and overlooking that lovely Windermere. Surely no poet was ever more delightfully lodged?'

'No poet was ever so happy in the whole world, I believe,' assented Corisande—'except perhaps Tennyson. Just think! He had married the "perfect woman, nobly planned"; he had the nicest, sweetest, devotedest sister, who agreed with the perfect woman, which doesn't always happen. He was contented, even thankful for his lot. He had leisure—friends too, who *were* friends, that is, friends in need. They stood by him when such support was of value: Raisley Calvert, who left him a legacy of a thousand pounds, which sufficed to give him leisure and ease of mind just when he most required it; and Lord Lonsdale, who paid up his father's debt, which meant life-long independence.'

'How very seldom the friends of poets and writers,' said Mrs. Banneret, 'think of the very thing which would earn their everlasting gratitude! They flatter and profess admiration, but stop short of substantial benefits. But, perhaps, after all, the poet's healthiest frame of mind is that of

independence. Being compelled to work certainly brings out the best fruit of a man's intellect.'

'Yes, indeed! Yet it is pitiable to think how poets and dramatists, not to mention the herd of fictionists, worked under depressing conditions of penury, even absolute want. Read the private papers of Henry Ryecroft, which no doubt faithfully represented the experience of the author. It makes your heart ache—the direst poverty, hunger and cold, shivering in semi-starvation—think of a London winter under such conditions! How he could have produced the work he did is a marvel!'

'I may be allowed to remark, perhaps,' said Mr. Banneret, in a judicial tone of voice, 'that we are wandering from the direct path in discussing the abstract question of a poet's freedom from care bearing upon the quality of his work. As to the quantity, it may, and no doubt would, make a serious deduction if at breakfast time the singer or seer was uncertain as to the periodicity of dinner. But I am inclined to think that, as to *quality*, the enforced abstinence and lack of material comfort were distinctly favourable to the "divine afflatus."'

'That being so,' said Reggie, 'and I am inclined to agree with you, sir, we ought to address ourselves to the practical side of our undertaking. Before we make a start for Rydal Mount we are bound to inaugurate the worship of the Poet by the ladies repeating some of his lovely lyrics. We must put it to the vote, and whoever gains the largest number must recite the poem which she deems to be the most distinctly representative of the Poet's genius? Who is the Wordsworth

scholar of the party? and what does the lady assert to be one of the Poet's lyric triumphs?'

The voting was in favour of Mrs. Banneret. That lady confessed that she had not been an exhaustive student of the poet under discussion, or indeed of any other—had not had time of late years. But in an old scrap-album of her girlhood's days might be found several of his poems, which she had copied out. One which she still remembered was 'The Fountain.'

'It always appeared to me,' she said, 'most truly representative of Wordsworth's sympathy with Nature; of his power of investing the most ordinary incidents with

> 'The gleam,
> The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream—

almost with a sacred simplicity, but still appealing to the heart as ornate phrases rarely succeed in doing. I still remember the opening verses of

'THE FOUNTAIN

> 'We talked with open heart, and tongue
> Affectionate and true,
> A pair of friends, though I was young,
> And Matthew seventy-two.
>
> 'We lay beneath a spreading oak,
> Beside a mossy seat;
> And from the turf a fountain broke,
> And gurgled at our feet.
>
> '"Now, Matthew," said I, "let us match
> The water's pleasant tune
> With some old Border song, or catch
> Which suits a summer noon;

'"Or of the church-clock and the chimes
Sing here beneath the shade,
That half-mad thing of witty rhymes
Which you last April made!"

'In silence Matthew lay, and eyed
The spring beneath the tree;
And thus the dear old man replied—
The grey-haired man of glee:

'"No check, no stay, this streamlet fears;
How merrily it goes!
'Twill murmur on a thousand years,
And flow as now it flows.

'"And here, on this delightful day,
I cannot choose but think
How oft, a vigorous man, I lay
Beside this fountain's brink.

'"My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those years I heard.

'"Thus fares it still in our decay:
And yet the wiser mind
Mourns less for what Age takes away
Than what it leaves behind."'

Here the lady paused. 'I think these verses are all that I can remember of the poem at present. But they impressed themselves on my memory long since, as a delicious description of calmly happy old age, of friendship founded on sympathetic tastes, with a setting for the incident of the rural loveliness of an English summer day.'

Much applause was evoked by the recitation, given with taste and feeling.

'Why, mother, I had no idea you had such

a sentimental vein in your composition,' said Hermione. 'Vanda and I used to think you were quite stern about unprofitable reading, as you used to call anything but history and language in the old Carjagong days!'

'Everything depends upon the proper time and place,' replied Mrs. Banneret, with a quiet smile. 'You girls and boys would have learned very little if you had not been kept to your morning lessons in those days.'

'But we were so terribly fond of books,' argued Vanda; 'it ran in the blood. Why, father used to read on *horseback*, when he took those journeys to other goldfields and places—when he was driving, too—by himself; you know he did!'

'It was very natural, I'm sure,' replied Mrs. Banneret. 'Riding or driving all day, by one's self, is rather dull. Bishop Percy and his wife, a charming woman, travelled in all weathers, through the diocese, in a dog-cart. She used to read aloud while he drove.'

'I remember them quite well,' said Hermione, 'when they stopped at our old station. I was quite a small child. They had no children. You couldn't have done that, mother, though you would have liked it, I know.'

'Indeed I should, but you tiresome children came in the way of that and many other recreations. What do you say at cricket when the innings is over? "Next man in"—isn't it? I think mine is over, and that we should call upon Corisande for a contribution, and then adjourn any other intellectual exercise to a future occasion.'

This motion, being put to the vote, was carried, and the young lady in question, being entreated not to delay the movement of the pilgrimage, graciously consented, remarking: 'I am very fond of birds, so all my friends will understand the reason why I volunteer to give

'THE REVERIE OF POOR SUSAN

'At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years:
Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the bird.

''Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

'Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
Down which she so often has tripped with her pail;
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The only one dwelling on earth that she loves.

'She looks, and her heart is in Heaven: but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes!'

The acclamations were loud, so general, so prolonged, that an encore was even demanded. Mr. Banneret, who had been unanimously elected stage manager, felt it his duty to declare that no encores would be permitted. 'But,' continued he, 'as my wife and Miss Corisande have complied with the general wish, I think it only fair that my daughters should furnish their share, which I think can be managed without serious delay to the expedition.

Vanda, dear child, lead off! I know you have a choice.'

'Oh, certainly! Corisande told us she was fond of birds; now I am passionately fond of flowers. It will be quite in keeping therefore with the spirit of our show if I choose

'THE DAFFODILS

'I wandered lonely as a cloud
Which floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

'Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

'The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

'For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon the inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.'

'Next girl in,' said Eric. 'Hermie dear, don't block the procession; consider all the pretty things

said of Vanda's artless lay. We know how fond she is of the bliss of solitude, and how ready to dance with the daffodils, or other eligible partners.'

'Chiefly in order to put an end to your cheap sarcasm,' retorted Hermione, 'also to finish the affair decently, I will make an attempt to render "The Solitary Reaper." I remember weeping bitterly over it in childhood.

'THE SOLITARY REAPER

'Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

'No nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
Such thrilling voice was never heard
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

'Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

'Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.'

'Charmin'! charmin'! absolutely, truly excellent!' said the Honourable Falkland Aylmer, R.N. 'Emphasis perfect, very clear and distinct intonation, but there's one triflin' thing I noticed—slight departure from "well of English undefiled"—probably Australian fashion; excuse me for alludin' to it.'

'Oh, of course, certainly!' said Hermione. 'I know I'm only "a despisable colonist" (as the author of *Sam Slick* said), but mother and father are rather purists, and we fancied that we spoke tolerable English.'

Falkland Aylmer's blue eyes danced with mischief and merriment at his successful 'draw,' thinking the while how handsome the girl looked with sudden glance and heightened colour; but putting on an expression of exaggerated humility he said, 'Perhaps I shouldn't have noticed—rather rude, of course—but you and Miss Vanda are so perfect in intonation generally, that I thought I would venture just to hint——'

'On the contrary, I feel sure,' said Hermione, with a certain stateliness of manner, 'that my people would hold themselves deeply indebted to you for pointing out any provincialisms—no twang, I trust?'

By this time the rest of the family had gathered round, amused and expectant.

'Pray don't keep us waiting, Mr. Aylmer,' said Vanda. 'You don't know Hermie when she's roused, though she looks so quiet.' Here every one burst out laughing; her amiability being proverbial.

'If I must, I must—I rely on the mercy of the Court'—here he lowered his voice to a deep and impressive bass—'but you can't deny that you pronounce the final "g."'

'Of course I do,' replied the girl, who could not help smiling, as indeed did all the spectators.

'But you shouldn't—oh, really, you shouldn't, dear lady! You said "bending," and "reaping," and "singing." We heard you distinctly "thrilling" also.'

'Of course I did; and why not?' the girl answered, with a distinctly bellicose air—looking indeed as if she was likely to confirm Vanda's assertion of the possession of an unexpected temper. 'We were taught that dropping the "g" was next door to the unforgivable sin of dropping the "h."'

'But it's not good form, dear Miss Banneret, to sound the final "g." Nobody does it—that is, nobody that is anybody. The other way is old-fashioned.'

'I don't care,' retorted the valiant Hermione; 'our Australian way is good English, and that I'll abide by. The other is an affectation, a senseless departure, copied by silly people who believe it to be fashionable—like "dwopping" the "r."'

'Assure you, it's nevah done now,' said her critical reviewer; 'though I think I must "pwactise," if only to take a "wise" out of you and Miss Vanda.'

'We shall have to arrange an ambush for you to fall into,' replied Hermione, laughing good-humouredly. 'We are willing to mend our ways in minor matters when we think we are wrong, but not merely to copy English fashions because they *are* English, which would be affectation indeed, and very properly expose us to ridicule.'

'*Nothing* that you or Miss Vanda could say or do would end so disastrously. I hope you believe me,' he added in a lower tone, 'and forgive my imprudence?'

'I grant you my royal pardon,' she said, holding out her hand. 'I confess that we Australians are just a trifle touchy, and I began to be frightened that I had committed some enormity.'

. . . . . .

Saturated as the feminine division of the pilgrims was with the Wordsworth cult, nothing but the necessity of laying out regular stages and abiding by them prevented them from lingering in this enchanted spot.

But the route was given; the leaders decreed the hour; and protests were unavailing.

> But, hark! the summons—down the placid lake
> Floats the soft cadence of the church-tower bells.

. . . . . .

Northward, ever northward, was now the appointed course of the wanderers: across moor

and fell to Yorkshire, with its somewhat rude inhabitants. Uninviting as it was in appearance, with barren-looking moors and desolate stretches of rocky undulations, it held within its bosom a jewel of priceless worth. There stood the lonely parsonage of world-wide fame, where had lived the Brontë family — the wondrous girls who, from that dreary parsonage, standing among graves, on a wind-beaten hill-top, aroused the admiration of the keenest literary intelligences of the period. Then the order of the day was the route to Keighley in Yorkshire, four miles only from Haworth; and to Keighley by ordinary, perhaps prosaic, methods the pilgrims proceeded.

For to Keighley, they were aware, the Brontës, these strange children, fiercely desirous of knowledge of all and every kind and sort, were accustomed to walk from the village of Haworth. Why? Because there was a draper's shop? Because there was at rare intervals a fair of the period? None of these provincial recreations interested this remarkable family. No! But because there was a circulating library. For that sole reason did these delicate little creatures undertake the rough moorland walk of eight miles —four miles there and four miles back—'happy, though often tired to death, if only they brought home a novel by Scott or a poem by Southey.' Brought home! To what a home did the tired feet and aching limbs bring these eager searchers after knowledge! To a 'grey parsonage standing among graves, on a wind-beaten hill-top; the neighbouring summits wild with moors. A lonely

place, among half-dead ash trees and stunted thorns. The world cut off on one side by the still ranks of the serried dead ; distanced on the other by mile-wide stretches of heath.' Such, we know, was Emily Brontë's home, the vicinity inhabited by Catharine, by Heathcliff, by Earnshaw, and Hindley.

'Oh, what a dreadful place to live in!' cried Hermione ; 'it recalls Kinglake's description of the country around Jerusalem—"a land unspeakably desolate and ghastly"—no wonder the poor things died early and Branwell drank. When one thinks of that murderous school at Cowan Bridge it is hard to restrain one's feelings.'

'Some people love moors and fells,' argued Vanda ; 'there's a wild and rugged grandeur about them ; and Yorkshiremen, next to the Scots, are among the boldest of the races of Britain. Look at the men and women we watched going to that mill!'

'All very well,' said her unconvinced sister. 'The climate kills off the weak ones ; but what of those poor, sensitive little creatures, shivering and ill-fed, in that unhealthy, undrained hole? That fanatical idiot of a clergyman ought to have been sent to gaol, and a teacher or two hanged! He was rich too, and thanked God for the progress of the school, while these dear babes starved by inches.'

'Gently, my dear Hermie!' said Reggie ; 'he's not the only historical personage who has killed, or tortured, for the glory of God ; but the whole affair is plunged in lamentation, mourning, and

woe. I vote we leave for Scotland by the early train to-morrow.'

'By the very earliest,' Eric agreed. 'Another day here would send us back to Hexham — despairing of life, and fit for nothing but suicide.'

'All the same, moors and heaths have their redeeming features,' insisted Vanda. 'Don't you remember how Justice Inglewood calls Die Vernon his "heath-blossom," when, pulling her towards him by the hand, he says: "Another time let the law take its course—and, Die, my beauty! let young fellows show each other the way through the moors"?'

'All very well for Die Vernon, with a blood mare to ride, and a cavalier like Frank Osbaldistone to gallop about with her. But think of three lonely girls, with not even a wicked cousin, like Rashleigh, to fight with, or a delightful, handsome, romantic one like Frank, to fall in and out of love with! But now I think the Brontë experience has gone far enough. Let us agree that the incident is closed. We make an early start to-morrow.'

'And so say all of us,' chorused the rest of the party.

CHAPTER XVIII

The next departure was made successfully. From Yorkshire to Scotland is no great distance, though the wanderers did not cross the moors to Hawkstone Craig, but proceeded by the more modern route of Keighley and Sheffield.

Behold the pilgrims then, by the kind offices of the steam king, whose miracles Sir Walter regarded with 'half-proud, half-sad, half-angry, and half-pleased feelings,' landed within walking distance of Abbotsford, and its haunting, magical memories of the Wizard of the North. They gazed with awe, and almost adoration, at the towers and turrets, pinnacles and mouldings of the famous abode of the more famous owner and designer. It seemed to these ardent spirits not so much a house, a family abode, as an enchanted Arabian Nights Palace, compact of the flesh and blood, the brain and spiritual essence of him whose pride and life-work it was. They were able to find suitable lodging accommodation in the vicinity, whence they could sally forth and live, so to speak, in that wondrous company of knights and nobles, mediæval barons, Normans and Saxons,

kings and queens, lovely heroines, and all the *dramatis personæ* of historical romance. They therefore, without delay, conceived and carried out the project of 'viewing fair Melrose aright.'

As it happened, the day had been doubtful, but towards evening the wind dropped, and the night being cloudless, and resplendent with the full radiance of the harvest moon, they had taken all proper precaution to be deposited as nearly as possible at the exact spot where the imagined spectator of 'St. David's ruined pile' would have located himself.

It was a night superbly beautiful—mild, calm, free from all disturbing influences, and permitting our pilgrims the fullest freedom to gaze on a scene at once romantic and inspiring, free from all such interruptions as might be expected in the light of day.

'I think I must ask for a vote in favour of the election of a president, or chairman—if there was any place on which to sit,' said Mr. Banneret. 'We cannot afford to spend the whole evening gazing at these ruins, worthy as they are of our admiration.'

'There is no one so fitted for the position, sir, as yourself,' said Falkland Aylmer, 'and I beg to propose that you be elected by acclamation to that honourable position.'

'I suppose I can second the motion,' said Hermione, 'though I don't believe they have adult female suffrage in England yet; of course it's coming with other enlightened reforms.'

'I believe Dad knows all the Walter Scott

literature by heart,' said Vanda—'stock, lock, and barrel, or rather, prose, poetry, and miscellany. Those who are for—hold up the right hand. Against—none: carried unanimously. Who will contribute the immortal invocation? Behold the hour and the man!' as Eric Banneret stepped forward, in answer to a signal from his mother.

That young man, who strongly resembled his mother in appearance and leading characteristics, as sons are wont to do by the acknowledged rules of heredity, responded with a look of assent to Mrs. Banneret's suggestive smile of approval, and, without further delay, began with the opening lines:—

'If thou wouldst view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moonlight;
For the gay beams of lightsome day
Gild, but to flout, the ruins grey.
When the broken arches are black in night,
And each shafted oriel glimmers white;
When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruin'd central tower;
When buttress and buttress, alternately,
Seem framed of ebon and ivory;
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;
When distant Tweed is heard to rave,
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
Then go—but go alone the while—
Then view St. David's ruin'd pile;
And, home returning, soothly swear,
Was never scene so sad and fair!'

'Bravo, Eric!' said Hermione. 'I had no idea you had such poetical leanings. Do they examine in modern verse and elocution at Cambridge?

I didn't know they taught anything but Greek and Latin.'

'Didn't you?' replied her brother. 'Perhaps you would like to enter next term?'

'I shouldn't mind,' returned the young lady; 'only it's rather late in life to begin. If I thought I'd pull off the classic tripos, as Hypatia Tollemache did, it might be worth while. One girl did —an Australian, too— a year or two back. I forget her name now. Oh, listen! wasn't that an owl? Let no one talk for five minutes, until "the distant Tweed is heard to rave." There it is; you can hear it quite plainly now.'

The night was free from slightest breeze; no sound broke the air but the weird, occasional cry of the night bird.

'I hear the Tweed,' said Corisande suddenly, as the ripple of the river over the shallows of the upper stream came faintly but distinctly on the ear. 'What a solemn rhythm it has! We shall never forget this night, shall we? I feel drawn so much nearer to dear Sir Walter, and to think that he should no sooner have built and planted this lovely place, decorated, beautified it — loved it, and benefited every one within his reach, than the great brain and the great heart wore out.'

'Which exhibits the vanity of human wishes,' said Mr. Banneret musingly. 'His great aim was to found a family, and that his children's children should inhabit Abbotsford after him.'

'A very worthy ambition, sir,' said Reggie, 'which I trust other heads of families will bear in mind, and, not being poets and novelists, will be

wise in time, and neither over-build nor over-speculate until they have provided for the rising generation.'

'And how about being the "architects of their own fortunes," as the phrase goes? Is that honourable occupation to be taken away from them—the men of the family, of course, I mean. Who is to found New Englands and Greater Britains if every young man in the old country is left comfortably off?'

'There's a good deal to be said on both sides, sir,' said Reggie. 'Personally, I should prefer to go forth, like the prince in the fairy tale, to "seek my fortune."'

. . . . . .

Melrose having 'been viewed aright,' studied, and discussed from every possible point of view, the trend of public opinion set strongly towards a visit to Abbotsford, as the central point of attraction. To be personally conducted would, of course, be most desirable, the family being absent in Switzerland. The housekeeper would, doubtless, have instructions to permit such personages and pilgrims of distinction to have, at any rate, a limited permission to view the apartments with which they had been familiar by description, and in which the interest of well-informed visitors chiefly centred.

Here, again, fortune favoured them, and a delightful surprise was sprung upon the leaders of the party.

To their great joy Mrs. Banneret received a note from an Australian compatriot (whom they

had first met near the Pink and White Terraces of Te Tarata, New Zealand), as fair, as graceful, as blue-eyed, as truly compounded of the air and fire of the Scottish Highlands, as ever was a Princess of Thule, though grown to woman's estate ere ever she saw the ancestral hills.

She was now 'a woman grown and wed,' though still too fairylike and youthful-seeming for the matronly estate. Her husband was away on his usual summer excursion, which she was sure he would deeply regret, but as their home was within a few miles of Abbotsford she would only be too delighted to supply his place, as far as guide and chaperon duties could be united. Fortunately for the interests of the pilgrimage she had been prevented from accompanying him.

'We are being watched over by the *genius loci*, that is very certain,' said Reggie. 'How it comes to pass that these delightful, interesting personages seem to turn up at critical junctures, beats me. May I ask if this Mrs. Maclean is above the average in point of good looks?'

'She is one of the sweetest, prettiest, most charming young women I ever encountered,' declared Mrs. Banneret.

'And Dad met her on board ship, I think I gathered?'

'Yes, coming from New Zealand,' volunteered Vanda; 'but wait till you see her. She has a look of "Sheila" and "A Daughter of Heth" comcombined.'

'H—m, ha! There seems a certain uniformity in the pleasant acquaintances Dad meets with

on his travels. They are rarely to be described as plain, I observe. But as long as you don't object, mater, it's not our business.'

'Your father's taste is correct in all respects, Master Reggie,' replied Mrs. Banneret, with an air of decision. 'I hope we shall always be able to say the same of your prepossessions.'

'Hope and trust you will, mother dear! I suppose none of us boys will have a chance with this ex-princess; she seems to have got such a start.'

'I saw her,' said Hermione, 'just before the Melbourne Cup. Corisande and I are trembling in our shoes.'

The fair object of this discussion lost no time in commencing the hospitable office which she had guaranteed to perform—making her appearance, indeed, shortly after breakfast, and equipped for joining the pedestrian party if such was desired. Needless to say, she was enthusiastically received. After greeting Mr. and Mrs. Banneret with true Highland cordiality, the needful introductions being completed, Mrs. Maclean said:

'And so these are the young people I remember in Sydney, after we landed from the *Hauroto*? How they have grown! The young gentlemen were in England, but Hermione and Vanda I should have known anywhere. You can't think what a joy it is to me to meet you all here "on my native heath," so to speak—only I wasn't born on it; and it nearly broke my heart when we came away from the old station on the Wondabyne, and I was sent to school in England. I used to cry and cry for hours At last I got so low-spirited

that mother began to talk of going back to Australia. There was one book that brought back the dear old days, however. I used to read it over and over again when I felt homesick and almost too miserable to live. It brought back the scent of the gum leaf in the early morn, the gold glint of the wattle-blossom in spring, and the rattle of hoofs when the horses were brought in for the day. At last they took it away from me, as it was thought it had a bad effect. You will guess what book it was!'

'And of course it was *The Marstons*,' said Vanda; 'we all went wild about it too. We have a Rainbow in the family now, and a very dear horse he is. I think every boy and girl in the world, from "India to the Pole," has read it. However, we have read other books as well, and now we are pledged to talk heather and rowan tree, and Yarrow and Gala Water, and Leader Haughs, no end.'

'And such being the case we must not lose time in talking, but make a start,' said their charming visitor.

'I know all about the "lay of the country," as we used to say in Australia, and am considered to be a competent cicerone. Where shall we go first? I suppose you are all good walkers?'

'Corisande can give us all points at that,' said Hermione, 'though she seems to have lived in a flat country of late years; but no doubt her ancestors, who came from Norway a thousand years ago, had different experiences, and tripped up and down mountains like red deer.'

'Nonsense, Hermie!' said that young lady. 'We did all our walking exercise, as the grooms say, in good old Bruges, for a sufficient reason—father's cheque-book didn't run to horses, or carriages either. I daresay it was all the better for us then. But we know our Scott fairly well: Mr. Banneret has been putting us through, till we know the names of Sir Walter's horses and dogs as well as his heroines and heroes. Suppose we go to the top of "the range," as Vanda says, where he took Washington Irving?'

'A very good idea,' said Mrs. Banneret. 'You remember he pointed out Lammermoor and Smailholm, Gala Water and Torwoodlee, forbye (to be very Scotch) Teviotdale and the Braes of Yarrow.'

'Oh, delightful!' cried Vanda. 'We can fancy we see the Baron of Smailholm and that poor, dear, undecided Lucy Ashton. How she could have given up such a man as the Master of Ravenswood—dark, handsome, mysteriously unhappy—I can't think! However, girls have more liberty nowadays, and mothers are not so despotic—not that this dear Mum will ever interfere with our happiness.'

'All depends upon the amount of sense the said daughters are credited with,' said her mother, with a meaning smile. 'There *have* been cases where parental rule has prevented life-long misery. However, let us hope that no such conflicts may arise among the members of this fair company. And now that we have our dear Mrs. Maclean to guide our steps, who, if she is not "to the manner

born," is much the same in local knowledge, we must lose no more time than we can help.'

The ramble over the hills satisfied the most ardent pedestrians of the party. The prospect was wide and majestic—the heather-bloom, of which they availed themselves liberally, was pronounced to be equal to all the praise bestowed upon it ; the streams of Ettrick and Gala Water, winding silverly through valley and meadow, before losing themselves in Tweed's fair river, worthy of all poetic praise. But, truth to tell, they were disappointed with the absence of timber on the banks of the world-famous river. The hills, too, were bare ; and to eyes accustomed to the primeval forests of giant eucalyptus which clothe Australian mountain-sides, and overhang the river banks, there seemed a want of adequate shelter. However, the whole surroundings were in keeping with 'Caledonia, stern and wild,' and as the plantations around Abbotsford, so lovingly tended by the Magician, whose art could cause groves and fountains to appear and vanish at command, had grown surprisingly since their establishment in 1812, it was decided finally not to give utterance to a syllable of disparagement. The landscape had sufficed for the home and happiness of the immortal possessor. On this occasion a wide expanse of the Border country lay spread out before them. They were thus enabled to verify the scenes of those 'poems and romances which had bewitched the world.'

'Kaeside,' where 'Willie Laidlaw,' Sir Walter's friend and amanuensis, dwelt, was also visited.

Traditionary legends tell of the curse of chronic poverty, supposed to have been laid on the race by a malign ancestress. The name was familiar to Arnold Banneret, who had known in his youth a family of the same name in Australia. They were related to the man of whom Sir Walter had so high an opinion, and whom he honoured with his friendship. But the voyage across the wide Pacific, or the influence of a new country, had apparently neutralised the malediction, for the Australian Laidlaws, now a fairly numerous clan, are in all cases held in respect, as well for their high character as their large landed possessions.

And thus, the weather being gracious, and all accessories befitting, they rambled through and around the haunted regions, upon which, though familiar with the *dramatis personæ* from childhood's hour, they had never before set foot, or gazed with admiring eye.

They did not depart without ocular experience of the Trossachs, or of

> Ancient Riddel's fair domain,
> Where Aill, from mountains freed,
> Down from the lakes did raving come;
> Each wave was crested with tawny foam,
> Like the mane of a chestnut steed.

They stood more than once on Turnagain on Tweedside, where

> Home and Douglas, in the van,
> Bore down Buccleuch's retiring clan,
> Till gallant Cessford's heart-blood dear
> Reek'd on dark Elliot's Border spear.

Under the guidance of their accomplished compatriot, the Banneret family with their visitors were conducted successfully through scenes world-known and historical, which they had never dreamed of exploring.

With such a chaperon they were received everywhere with the most cordial hospitality—not only as dwellers in a far land, but as natives of the dim and distant Australian waste (as their entertainers had been contented to regard their country), and their hosts' curiosity was stimulated as keenly as it was pleasantly allayed by the refined manners and cultured intelligence of the strangers. This familiarity with Scottish scenery and character, albeit at second hand, surprised as much as it gratified their entertainers. And indeed an offer was made to Reggie, if he would consent to stand for a certain seat in the Liberal interest, to ensure him a controlling vote, and in all probability to return him for the locality specified. That rising politician, in a neat speech, which showed that he had not been a foremost member of the 'Union' for nothing, assured them that he felt the compliment intensely, but would not, until he had completed his *Wanderjahre*, be in a position to comply with their request. In the meantime, let him assure them that he would never forget this mark of their confidence.

After this memorable incident the pilgrims were reminded by the president that, although they felt so charmed with the scenery and inhabitants of this delightful region, time was flying, and if they desired to form a true estimate of Scotland and

the Isles, hardly less historically important, they must not linger, however entrancing the locality. The logic was unanswerable, so, with many a sigh and groan, even a few tears from Hermione and Vanda, they tore themselves away. One more evening was, however, granted to Mrs. Maclean's entreaties, by whom it was suggested that it should be distinguished as a Sir Walter Scott symposium, making it compulsory for each one of the party to recite a favourite passage, either prose or poetry, from the works of the Magician—a prize to be given for the best selection, as also for the quality of elocution. This was assented to, and great researches were instituted in the library, where, fortunately, there were editions of all dates and sizes. The order of precedence was decided by vote, and resulted in favour of Mr. Banneret, who, without loss of time, began at the first canto of *Marmion*.

'I have always thought *Marmion* to be in all respects the finest of his, of any man's, descriptive poems. The author commands the attention and excites the admiration of readers of all ages, ranks, and conditions, from the "dear school-boy, cheated of his holiday," to personages eminent in war or peace, patriots or peasants. Nothing in the language rivals that of the battle of Flodden Field—the clash of the sword-blades, the shock of the coursers.

'Though charging knights like whirlwinds go,
Though bill-men ply the ghastly blow,
Unbroken was the ring;
The stubborn spear-men still made good
Their dark impenetrable wood,
Each stepping where his comrade stood,
The instant that he fell.

Where was ever such a picture of a battle in actual engagement ?

'Then marked they, dashing broad and far,
The broken billows of the war,
And plumed crests of chieftains brave,
Floating like foam upon the wave ;
But nought distinct they see :
Wide raged the battle on the plain ;
Spears shook, and falchions flashed amain ;
Fell England's arrow-flight like rain ;
Crests rose, and stooped, and rose again,
Wild and disorderly.
Amid the scene of tumult, high
They saw Lord Marmion's falcon fly :
And stainless Tunstall's banner white,
And Edmund Howard's lion bright,
Still bear them bravely in the fight :
Although against them come,
Of gallant Gordons many a one,
And many a stubborn Badenoch-man,
And many a rugged Border clan,
With Huntly, and with Home.

Then the ghastly picture of the fallen knight, mortally wounded,

'Dragged from among the horses' feet,
With dinted shield, and helmet beat,
The falcon-crest and plumage gone,
Can that be haughty Marmion !

'Passing from the fire and dash of the battle-piece, we have the warrior's despairing appeal—

'And half he murmured,—"Is there none,
Of all my halls have nursed,
Page, squire, or groom, one cup to bring
Of blessed water from the spring,
To slake my dying thirst !'

Here occurs the immortal tribute to the higher

qualities of the sex, nowhere seen to such advantage as in the dark hour of helpless suffering :—

'O, Woman ! in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made ;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou !

'In "L'Envoy" Sir Walter's boundless benevolence, after wishing all desirable gifts to statesmen and heroes, and of course to

'Lovely lady bright,
What can I wish but faithful knight?

even includes that occasionally troublesome personage not often honoured with poet's notice—

'To thee, dear school-boy, whom my lay
Has cheated of thy hour of play,
Light task, and merry holiday !
To all, to each, a fair good-night,
And pleasing dreams and slumbers light !

'I was a small school-boy,' said Mr. Banneret, 'when I knew by heart a large portion of *Marmion*; and at not particularly protracted intervals I seem to have been enjoying Sir Walter's works, prose, poetry, and even the records of his noble life, ever since. Marmion, with the glamour of valour blinding the reader to his vices, is a boy's hero —brave, unscrupulous, successful, until

'The Fiend, to whom belongs
The vengeance due to all her wrongs

appears at life's close with tragic and dramatic effect. And what in all poetry is more thrilling,

more absorbing, than the closing scene of "injured Constance's" wasted career; what more dignified than her invocation; more terrible, more piteous than that dread indictment which will ring throughout the ages, than the lingering death under the conventual law of a merciless age?—the gloomy rock-hewn vault that "was to the sounding surge so near"

> 'You seem'd to hear a distant rill—
> 'Twas ocean's swells and falls;
> A tempest there you scarce could hear
> So massive were the walls.
>
> . . . . . .

'Distant as is the period, fictitious the personages, dimly historical the action, the magic of genius invests them with an actuality which causes mental, almost physical pain to the sympathetic reader. Surely the Muse can desire no more transcendent tribute.'

A chorus of congratulations followed the conclusion of Mr. Banneret's reminiscent adoration of his favourite author. His wife thought that a passage from one of the novels would be a fitting diversion from perhaps the too melancholy episode to which they had been listening. *Rob Roy* had been an early favourite. The character of Diana Vernon had always represented to her mind the attributes of the noblest type of womanhood—presenting high courage, passionate personal attachment, combined with deep devotion to parental duty, never suffered to be in abeyance for a moment.

'The highest personal courage combined with the loftiest sense of self-sacrifice was hers, the whole illumined in befitting time and place with

gleams of humour and sportive playfulness, betokening how, under happier circumstances, she could adapt herself to the joyous *abandon* of the hour. With all a man's courage and steadfastness in the hour of danger, she exhibited the fascination of her sex undiminished, indeed heightened by the daily dangers amid which she trod so warily and securely. Then she rode so well. I think she is one among the few heroines that Sir Walter exhibits to his readers on horseback. The ill-fated Clara Mowbray, poor girl! rode recklessly; but she was half-crazed through treachery and evil fortune.'

'How about Rebecca of York?' said Reggie Banneret. 'She rode to Ashby-de-la-Zouche with her father, on a memorable occasion, though when carried off and lodged in Front de Bœuf's castle, together with the wounded Ivanhoe, she seems to have been travelling in a litter.'

'I always place Rebecca in the front rank of Sir Walter's heroines,' said Corisande. 'Her beauty, her charity, even to the men of the race that ill-used, despised, and plundered her nation, should gain her a prize at any show of fair women in or out of Novel Land. But except when she was carried off, and mounted before one of Brian de Bois-Guilbert's Eastern mutes, after the siege of Torquilstone Castle, she hadn't much chance of displaying her accomplishments in that line. She was a dear creature, and any one who can read the ending of the chapter, where she is sentenced to the stake, and Wilfred comes to the rescue, hardly able to sit on his horse, and that

wicked, fascinating Templar dies of heart failure at the right time, without feeling the tears in their eyes, has no sense, no feeling, no brains, and no heart—that's my opinion.'

'What a gallery of beauties Sir Walter's heroines would furnish!' said Eric. 'Indeed, I do remember seeing one in school-boy days, but I am afraid they were guilty of ringlets, and so would be voted unfashionable by the latter-day Johnnies—Edith Bellenden, Flora MacIvor, Rose Bradwardine, Julia Mannering, Amy Robsart, and a host of others—among them one Vanda! but I have less pity for any of their woes and misfortunes than for those of Clara Mowbray in *St. Ronan's Well*. Nothing finer in romantic tragedy can be found than her meeting with Francis Tyrrel on the road to Shaw's Castle.

'"'And what good purpose can your remaining here serve?' [she said]. 'Surely you need not come either to renew your own unhappiness or to augment mine?'

'"'To augment yours—God forbid!' answered Tyrrel. 'No; I came hither only because, after so many years of wandering, I longed to revisit the spot where all my hopes lay buried.'

'"'Ay, buried is the word,' she replied—'crushed down and buried when they budded fairest. I often think of it, Tyrrel; and there are times when, Heaven help me! I can think of little else. Look at me; you remember what I was—see what grief and solitude have made me.'

'"She flung back the veil which surrounded her

riding-hat, and which had hitherto hid her face. It was the same countenance which he had formerly known in all the bloom of early beauty; but though the beauty remained, the bloom was fled for ever. Not the agitation of exercise—not that which arose from the pain and confusion of this unexpected interview, had called to poor Clara's cheek even the semblance of colour. Her complexion was marble-white, like that of the finest piece of statuary.

'"'Is it possible?' said Tyrrel; 'can grief have made such ravages?'

'"'Grief,' replied Clara, 'is the sickness of the mind, and its sister is the sickness of the body; they are twin-sisters, Tyrrel, and are seldom long separate. Sometimes the body's disease comes first, and dims our eyes and palsies our hands before the fire of our mind and of our intellect is quenched. But mark me—soon after comes her cruel sister with her urn, and sprinkles cold dew on our hopes and loves, our memory, our recollections, and our feelings, and shows us that they cannot survive the decay of our bodily powers.'

'"'Alas!' said Tyrrel, 'is it come to this?'

'"'To this,' she replied, speaking from the rapid and irregular train of her own ideas, rather than comprehending the purport of his sorrowful exclamation—'it must ever come, while immortal souls are wedded to the perishable substance of which our bodies are composed. There is another state, Tyrrel, in which it will be otherwise; God grant our time of enjoying it were come!'"

'I cannot imagine anything more exquisite,' said Mrs. Banneret, 'than the portraiture of the ill-fated lovers, whose lives the arts of an unscrupulous villain had ruined, almost at their entrance into the paradise of wedded love. But the characters depicted throughout the novel are masterpieces of humour and descriptive accuracy. Lord Etherington, the fashionable, dissipated nobleman of the period, might have issued from a London Club. Touchwood, egotistical, kind-hearted, interfering, is the nabob, common enough in old-fashioned fiction. Lady Binks, John Mowbray, Sir Bingo, the choleric Highland half-pay Captain MacTurk, Winterblossom, the dilettante art critic, and the man of law, are exactly the denizens of a fourth-rate Spa; not to mention Meg Dods, the very flower and crown of Scottish provincial landladies. Then the dramatic incidents of the climax: Clara fleeing through storm and snow, from her brother's house in the night, to escape the forced and hateful marriage; the duel; the late appearance of Touchwood on the scene.'

'"He was stopped by Touchwood, who had just alighted from a carriage, with an air of stern anxiety on his features very different from their usual expression. 'Whither would ye?'—stopping him by force.

'"'For revenge—for revenge!' said Tyrrel. 'Give way, I charge you, on your peril!'

'"'Vengeance belongs to God,' replied the old man, 'and His bolt has fallen. This way—this

way,' he continued, dragging Tyrrel into the house. 'Know,' he said, 'that Mowbray of St. Ronan's has met Bulmer within this half-hour, and killed him on the spot.'

'"'Killed!—whom?' answered the bewildered Tyrrel.

'"'Valentine Bulmer, the titular Earl of Etherington.'

'"'You bring tidings of death to the house of death,' answered Tyrrel; 'and there is nothing in this world left that I should live for!'

CHAPTER XIX

'No one can have a higher admiration for dear Sir Walter than I have,' said Vanda, 'and I agree with Eric that this is one of the most pathetic scenes in the whole series of the novels. I have wept over Clara Mowbray myself, "full many a time and oft," as people used to say. Still, how many in number *are* the Waverley Novels?'

'I know,' answered Hermione, 'for I counted them last week. There are twenty-five, besides the poetical works. What a miracle of industry he was! A genuinely hospitable country gentleman —in earlier life a hard-working Clerk of Session, or whatever it was; while in his leisure hours he dashed off such trifles as *Waverley*, *Ivanhoe*, *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, and the rest. So if we set to work to discuss all the heroines in all the novels, with the pathetic and tragic incidents of their lives, it will take us years to "do" Scotland, and we shall never get back to England at all.'

Every one laughed at this summary of the situation. Mrs. Banneret thought Hermione's view correct in the main. 'Suppose,' she continued, 'that we coax our dear Mrs. Maclean to

join us in a farewell ramble, and devote the evening to a final discussion of Sir Walter's works, each pilgrim to produce a favourite passage, scene, ballad, or incident. To-morrow a start to be made south, and *no deviation* allowed on any pretence whatever.'

'Hear! hear!' cried Reggie and Corisande; while the others voted 'Ay' unanimously, and Mr. Banneret, with an affectation of despair, expressed himself as powerless to resist his fate.

The supper was a joyous meal, in spite of forebodings of what the morrow might bring, and the parting of those whom ironic fate might never permit to reassemble in the same pleasant *camaraderie*.

There was great hunting up of old editions and copyings of passages, stimulated by the promise of prizes to be given for the rendering of the happiest selections in prose and poetry. Mrs. Maclean left early in the evening, but promised to spend the whole following day with the pilgrims, and to furnish her quota to the competition. The programme for the next day's march was then completed with her aid and advice, and amid sincere regrets that this should be almost the last time they should meet in Britain, the symposium came to an end; the ladies of the party, after Mrs. Maclean's carriage had been driven off, declaring that they had little enough time to pack and arrange for departure.

'This is a "day to be marked with a white stone,"' said Corisande, after the travellers had come back in the late afternoon, reasonably tired,

but in high spirits, and overflowing with gratitude to Mrs. Maclean, whose local knowledge and unfailing desire to explain all things difficult to the southern comprehension, rendered her companionship inestimable.

Supper was a meal for the gods, abounding as it did with sportive criticism of the *personnel* and adventures of the day. Of the Highland shepherd, who 'had no English,' and could not therefore inform two of the party, half-way up a mountain, where he had seen the main body of the pilgrims, though obviously desirous of making the important statement, until Mrs. Maclean, arriving, put an end to the difficulty by half-a-dozen words in Gaelic, to Hermione's surprise and admiration; of the collie dogs, who understood only Lowland Scotch, and resented being told to 'come behind,' or 'fetch 'em back,' in plain English, or even unadulterated Australian.

The next day passed dreamily, all things wearing a subdued, if not sad expression, as of farewells in the air, sighs also and regrets, doubts as to meeting again, the uncertainties of life, ironies of fate, and so on.

Supper being over, Mrs. Banneret, foreseeing that the frolicsome chatter of the young folks would not lead to anything practical, called upon Reggie to make a commencement. That young gentleman, who was methodical of habit, had taken the trouble to look through the library, and being thus prepared, had chosen the description of the 'Abbotsford Hunt,' as, though neither

poetical nor romantic, delightfully descriptive of the hospitable, humorous, sport-loving side of Sir Walter's character.

'About the middle of August (writes his son-in-law, Lockhart, in 1820), 'my wife and I went to Abbotsford. We remained there for several weeks, during which time I became familiarised with Sir Walter Scott's mode of existence in the country. It was necessary to observe it, day after day, for a considerable period, before one could believe that such was, during nearly half the year, the routine of life with the most productive author of his age. The humblest person who stayed merely for a short visit must have departed with the impression that what he witnessed was an occasional variety; that Scott's courtesy prompted him to break in upon his habits when he had a stranger to amuse; but that it was physically impossible that the man who was writing the Waverley romances at the rate of nearly *twelve volumes* in the year, could continue, week after week, and month after month, to devote all but a hardly perceptible fraction of his mornings to out-of-doors occupations, and the whole of his evenings to the entertainment of a constantly varying circle of guests.

'The hospitality of his afternoons must alone have been enough to exhaust the energies of almost any man; for his visitors did not mean, like those of country houses in general, to enjoy the landlord's good cheer and amuse each other; the far greater proportion arrived from a distance,

for the sole sake of the Poet and Novelist *himself*, whose person they had never before seen, and whose voice they might never again have any opportunity of hearing. No other villa in Europe was ever resorted to from the same motives, and to anything like the same extent, except Ferney; and Voltaire never dreamt of being visible to his *hunters*, as he called them, except for a brief space of the day. Few of them even dined with him, and none of them seem to have slept under his roof. Scott's establishment, on the contrary, resembled in every particular that of the affluent idler, who, because he has inherited, or would fain transmit, political influence, keeps open house, receives as many as he has room for, and sees their apartments occupied, as soon as they vacate them, by another troop of the same description.

. . . . . .

'But with few exceptions Scott was the sole object of the Abbotsford pilgrims; and evening followed evening only to show him exerting for their amusement more of animal spirits, to say nothing of intellectual vigour, than would have been considered by any other man in the company as sufficient for the whole expenditure of a week's existence. Yet this was not the chief marvel: he talked of things that interested himself, because he knew that by doing so he should give most pleasure to his guests. It is needless to add that Sir Walter was familiarly known, long before these days, to almost all the nobility and higher gentry of Scotland; and consequently there seldom wanted a fair proportion of them to assist him in

doing the honours of his country. It is still more superfluous to say so respecting the heads of his own profession in Edinburgh; Abbotsford was their villa, whenever they pleased to resort to it, and few of them were absent from it long.

'As to the composition of the guests. Some were near relations who, except when they visited him, rarely, if ever, found admittance to what the dialect of the upper world is pleased to designate as "society." These were welcome guests, let who might be under that roof. It was the same with many a worthy citizen of Edinburgh, habitually moving in the obscurest of circles, who had been in the same class as Scott at the High School. To dwell on nothing else, it was surely the perfection of real universal humanity and politeness that could enable this great and good man to blend guests so multifarious in one group, and contrive to make all equally happy with him, with themselves, and with each another.

'It was a clear, bright September morning, and all was in readiness for a grand coursing match on Newark Hill. Sir Walter, mounted on Sibyl Grey, was marshalling the order of the procession with a huge hunting-whip, and among a dozen frolicsome youths and maidens appeared on horseback, eager as the youngest sportsman in the troop, Sir Humphry Davy, Dr. Wollaston, and the patriarch of Scottish *belles lettres*, Henry Mackenzie. The Man of Feeling, however, was persuaded to resign his steed, and to join Lady Scott in the sociable, until the ground of the battue was reached. Laidlaw, on a longtailed,

wiry Highlander, yclept Hoddin Grey, which carried him nimbly and stoutly, though his feet almost touched the ground, was the adjutant.

'But the most picturesque figure was the illustrious inventor of the safety lamp. He had come for his favourite sport of angling, but had not prepared for coursing fields, and his fisherman's costume—a brown hat with flexible brims, surrounded with line upon line, and innumerable fly-hooks, jack-boots worthy of a Dutch smuggler, and a fustian coat dabbled with the blood of salmon—made a fine contrast with the smart jackets, white cord breeches, and well-polished jockey boots of the less distinguished cavaliers about him. Dr. Wollaston was in black, and with his noble, serene dignity of countenance might have passed for a sporting archbishop. Mr. Mackenzie, at this time in the seventy-sixth year of his age, with a white hat turned up with green, green spectacles, and long brown leather gaiters, wore a dog-whistle round his neck, and had all over the air of as resolute a devotee as the gay captain of Huntly Burn. Tom Purdie had preceded us by a few hours, with all the greyhounds that could be collected at Abbotsford, Darnick, and Melrose; but the giant Maida had remained as his master's orderly, and now gambolled about Sibyl Grey, barking for mere joy like a spaniel puppy.

'On reaching Newark Castle we found Lady Scott, her eldest daughter, and the venerable Mackenzie, all busily engaged in unpacking a basket, and arranging a luncheon it contained, in

the mossy rocks overhanging the bed of the Yarrow. When such of the company as chose had partaken of the refection, the Man of Feeling resumed his pony and all ascended, duly marshalled in proper distances, so as to beat in a broad line over the heather, Sir Walter directing the movement from the right across towards Blackandro. Davy laid his whip about the fern like an experienced hand, and surveying the long, eager battalion of "bushrangers" [*sic*], exclaimed, "Good Heavens! is it thus that I visit the scenery of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*?" He kept muttering to himself, as his glowing eye ran over the landscape, some of those beautiful lines from the conclusion of the *Lay*:—

> But still,
> When summer smiled on sweet Bowhill,
> And July's eve, with balmy breath,
> Waved the blue-bells on Newark heath;
> When throstles sung in Harehead-shaw,
> And corn was green on Carterhaugh,
> And flourished, broad, Blackandro's oak,
> The aged Harper's soul awoke!

Mackenzie, spectacled as he was, saw the first sitting hare, gave the word to slip the greyhounds, and spurred after them like a boy.

'Coursing on such a mountain is not like the same sport over a bit of fine English pasture.

. . . . . .

'Many a bold rider measured his length among the peat-bogs, and another stranger to the ground besides Davy plunged neck-deep into a treacherous well-head, which, till they were floundering in it, had borne all the appearance of a piece of delicate

green turf. When Sir Humphry emerged from his involuntary bath, garnished with mud, slime, and mangled water-cresses, Sir Walter received him with a triumphant encore. But the philosopher had his revenge, for Scott put Sibyl Grey at a leap beyond her powers and lay humbled in the ditch, while Davy who was better mounted cleared it and him at a bound. Happily there was little damage done, but no one was sorry that the sociable had been detained at the foot of the hill.

'I have seen Sir Humphry on other occasions, and in company of many different descriptions, but never to such advantage as at Abbotsford. His host and he delighted in each other, and the modesty of their mutual admiration was a memorable spectacle. Davy was by nature a poet, and Scott, though anything but a philosopher, might have pursued the study of physical science with success, had he happened to fall in with Sir Humphry in early life. Each strove to make the other talk, and they did so in turn most charmingly. Scott in his romantic narratives touched a deeper chord of feeling than usual when he had such a listener as Davy; and Davy, when induced to open his views upon any question of scientific interest in Scott's presence, did so with a clear, energetic eloquence and a flow of imagery and illustration of which neither his habitual tone of table-talk nor any of his prose writings (except, indeed, the *Consolations in Travel*) could suggest an adequate notion.

'One night, when their "rapt talk" had kept the circle round the fire long after the usual bed-

time at Abbotsford, I remember Laidlaw whispering to me, "Gude preserve us! this is a very superior occasion! Eh, sirs!" he added, cocking his eye like a bird, "I wonder if Shakespeare and Bacon ever met to screw ilk other up?"

'The other "superior occasion" came later in the season: the 28th of October, the birthday of Sir Walter's eldest son, was that usually selected for the Abbotsford Hunt. This was a coursing match on a large scale, including as many of the younger gentry as pleased to attend, as well as all Scott's personal favourites among the yeomen and farmers of the surrounding country. The Sheriff nearly always took the field, but latterly devolved the command upon his good friend Mr. John Usher, the ex-laird of Toftfield. The hunt took place on the moors above Cauld-Shiels Loch, or over some of the hills on the estate of Gala, and we had commonly, ere we returned, hares enough to supply the wife of every farmer that attended, with soup for a week following. The whole party then dined at Abbotsford: the Sheriff in the chair; Adam Fergusson, croupier; and Dominie Thomson, of course, chaplain. The company whose onset had been thus deferred, were seldom under thirty and sometimes exceeded forty. The feast suited the occasion. A baron of beef, roasted, at the foot of the table, a salted round at the head, while tureens of hare soup, hotch-potch, and cock-a-leekie extended down the centre, with such light articles as geese, turkeys, sucking pigs, singed sheep's head, and the unfailing haggis, set forth by way of side dishes. Black cock and moorfowl,

bushels of snipe, black puddings, white puddings, and pyramids of pancakes, formed the second course. Ale was the favourite beverage during dinner, but there was plenty of port and sherry for those who preferred wine. The quaighs of Glenlivet were filled to the brim, and tossed off as if they held water. The wine decanters made a few rounds of the table, but the hints for hot punch and toddy soon became clamorous. Two or three bowls were introduced; then the business of the evening commenced in good earnest. The faces shone and glowed like those at Camacho's wedding; the chairman told the richest stories of old rural life; the stalwart Dandie Dinmonts lugged out their last winter's snowstorm, the parish scandal, perhaps, or the dexterous bargain of the Northumberland Tryst; Sheriff-substitute Shortreed gave us "Now Liddesdale has ridden a raid." His son, Sir Walter's most assiduous disciple and assistant in Border Heraldry and genealogy, shone without a rival in "Twa Corbies." Captain Ormistoun gave the primitive pastoral of "Cowdenknowes" in sweet perfection; other ballads succeeded, until the gallant croupier crowned the last bowl with "Ale, good ale; thou art my darling!" Imagine some smart Parisian *savant*, some dreamy pedant of Halle or Heidelberg, a brace of stray young lords from Oxford or Cambridge, with perhaps their college tutors, planted here and there among these rustic wassailers, this being their first vision of the author of *Marmion* and *Ivanhoe*, and he appearing as much at home in the scene as if he had been a veritable "Dandie" himself, his face

radiant, his laugh gay as childhood, his chorus always ready. And so it proceeded until some worthy, who had fifteen or twenty miles to ride home, began to insinuate that his wife would be getting anxious about the fords, and the Dumples and Hoddins were at last heard neighing at the gate. It was voted that the hour had come for "Doch an dorrach," the stirrup-cup—to wit, a bumper all round of the unmitigated mountain dew. How they all contrived to get home in safety Heaven only knows, but I never heard of any serious accident. One comely gude-wife amused Sir Walter, far off among the hills, the next time he passed her homestead, by repeating her husband's first words when he alighted at his own door: "Ailie, my woman, I'm ready for my bed—and, oh! lass, I wish I could sleep for a towmont, for there's only ae thing in this warld worth living for, and that's the Abbotsford Hunt."

There was a considerable amount of laudatory remark when the reading of the 'Abbotsford Hunt' was concluded.

'What a charming, delightful creature Sir Walter must have been!' said Hermione. 'What a pity he should ever have been hampered by debt and business worries. Such a model country gentleman, and, oh! as a companion, what an honour to have known him; to have watched his eye brighten and glow as some deed of valour or generous action came before him! Then his tenderness to children. Think of "Pet Marjorie"! Vanda and I cried our eyes out at her

death. And to know of her dying of measles, like any other child—with her wonderful intellect! It seems as if Providence should have intervened.'

'We must get on with our work, my dear children,' said Mrs. Banneret warningly. 'Our time is short. We are all with you, I am sure! Vanda, haven't you any pathetic fragment? I saw you reading *A Legend of Montrose* yesterday.'

'I think that novel contains some of Sir Walter's best examples of comic humour as well as of his deepest pathos. Captain Dalgetty on the one hand, with his memories of the immortal Gustavus and Marischal College, and, oh! while they are escaping from Inveraray Castle, the old Highlander, Ranald MacEagh, seeing his sons hanging on the gibbet, makes "a gesture of unutterable anguish." Nothing is finer, stronger, more deeply tragical in the whole series of the writer's prose and poetry.'

'My husband will always regret,' said Mrs. Maclean, 'that he was away when you visited our sacred shrine. He is a devoted worshipper; nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to have gone round all the haunts and homes of the Bard. He would have been so pleased to know that in my country—*my* country,' she repeated with a charming air of defiance, 'the seer of Abbotsford is as fully appreciated, and perhaps even more widely venerated than in the land of his birth.'

'I can confirm that statement,' said Mr. Banneret, 'for wherever you go in Australia and New Zealand, the Scots, "lowland or highland, far or near," appear to predominate. And in energy,

industry, and material success they invariably excel the Saxon and the Irish Celt.'

'To be sure, whateffer—I wass telling you so,' said Mrs. Maclean, with a pretty reproduction of the Highland accent of "Sheila," 'but you must not be too appreciative of the Australian Highlander, or you will make me conceited. Who is to follow on? It is your turn, I am sure, Mr. Eric.'

'I thought I was to be let off,' pleaded that young gentleman; 'but how about a trifle of poetry as a change?'

'I vote for "Bonnie Dundee,"' said Corisande. 'There is such a "lilt" about it, and it is above all such a record of dear Sir Walter's undying pluck and energy, as he wrote it with the expectation of ruin, soon to be converted into certainty, hanging over his head. You see he writes on the 22nd December—December of all months in the year! in Scotland, too!—"The air of 'Bonnie Dundee' running in my head to-day, I wrote a few verses to it before dinner. I wonder if they are good. Ah, poor Will Erskine, thou couldst and would have told me." Fancy writing a noble ballad like that when he was in a sense "expecting the bailiffs." How few men in his circumstances could have done it—fewer still could have produced work with the lifelike spirit of the great ballad, the clash of the kettle-drums, and the pathetic ending—

'Till on Ravelston's cliffs and on Clermiston's lea
Died away the wild war-notes of Bonny Dundee.

'"On December 25 arrived here, Abbotsford, last night, at seven. Our halls are silent now,

compared to last year, but let us be thankful. But come; let us see. I shall write out 'The Bonnets of Bonnie Dundee,' sketch a preface to La Roche—Jacquelin, for *Constable's Miscellany*—and try sketch notes for the Waverley Novels. Together with letters and by-business it will be a good day's work." One would think so indeed.'

Eric Banneret had a fresh voice with a fairly good ear, and his unaffected, hearty way of trolling out his favourite ditties, sea-songs, camp 'chanties,' and such, was effective. When he came to—

> 'Come fill up my cup, come fill up my can,
> Come saddle your horses, and call up your men;
> Come open the West Port, and let me gang free,
> And it's room for the bonnets of Bonny Dundee!'

the chorus included the full strength of the orchestra, and was enthusiastically supported. It was an undoubted success, and established Eric as an amateur of promise, who might have gone far, with the aid of scientific culture in early youth.

'That is what his father took special care he should never obtain,' said Mrs. Banneret, with an arch look. 'My husband has a fixed idea that a young man with an exceptional voice and a taste for music always comes to grief in Australia. Society, temptation, and flattery mostly accomplish his downfall. There are exceptions probably, but I have known, in my experience, strangely few.'

Here there were strong protests against the illogical position. 'Why should proficiency in the gentle and joyous science,' it was asked, 'incapacitate a man for the practical duties of life?'

'It ought not to do so,' conceded paterfamilias, 'but that it does I have observed in scores of instances, while the exceptions may be counted on the fingers of one hand. The possession of a fine voice, with skill in instrumental music, has a tendency to develop the romantic, emotional side of character, as also to weaken the practical qualities necessary for success in life. I don't speak as to other nations, but for British-born people and Australians it is a gift that spells ruin.'

'It is of no use arguing with my husband on that point,' said Mrs. Banneret, 'and I must confess that I have seen his theory strongly supported by facts; but, to vary the entertainment, suppose we persuade Mrs. Maclean to give us "Rothesay Bay." It is a sweet, plaintive ballad, and she will make the third Australian-born lady of Scottish extraction that I have heard sing it. They all had the very slightest tinge of the Highland accent, which, of course, made it all the more fascinating.'

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All forebodings were justified by the next morning's post. It brought a letter from Australia, which contained such important news that all arrangements for the present were altered. The expedition, indeed, was brought to an abrupt and untimely end. The letter was from Pilot Mount, Kalgoorlie, West Australia, and had followed, as directed by Mr. Banneret, the movements of the party. The news was important. It came from the Metallurgist of the mine, who by virtue of his office was the Acting Manager, and announced

the death of Mr. John Waters, popularly known as old Jack. There had been some difference of opinion lately (the writer said) between him and other officials concerning the working of the mine. Matters were not perfectly satisfactory, in his opinion. There had been an argument about wages, and a demand by the men for a rise. A 'strike' had been mentioned, but that was arranged for the present. Old Mr. John Waters had retired on the preceding night, apparently in his usual health, which was excellent, but had been found dead in his bed on the following morning. An inquest had been held before the Coroner of the district, and the medical evidence pronounced the case to be one of heart disease. In accordance with which a verdict of 'death from natural causes' was returned. He forwarded copies of the local papers, which contained full accounts of the proceedings.

It was his opinion, and also that of the principal officials and shareholders of the mine, that either Mr. Banneret in person, or some one fully empowered to act on his behalf, should visit the mine without delay. In the meantime, the working of the property and all other matters would go on as usual. He remained, faithfully yours, MALCOLM MACDONALD.

Thus recalled abruptly from the realm of romance, of fiction and song, Arnold Banneret felt, as had happened to himself many times in his adventurous life, the need of prompt decision and vigorous action. 'Poor old Jack!' He was sorry

for the veteran whose closing years apparently of comfort, even luxury, had been cut short by the stroke of fate. Perhaps it was a merciful dispensation. He himself, without doubt, would have so considered it. Fearless, even reckless, as miners are in the pursuit of their dangerous and at all times laborious calling, he had often spoken with dread of a lingering illness, of the pain and tedium of a wasting disorder, not seldom declaring that a sudden, a swift seizure would be his choice if granted one. Now he had his desire. His life, as all men knew, had been free from notorious evil-doing, and if occasional lapses from sobriety—the almost inevitable reaction of the uneducated labourer against monotonous toil and severe privation—had occurred, what wonder? These deviations from the strict line of duty had, however, been more rare in latter years, and, since the departure of the Banneret family for England, had almost ceased. Now the veteran who had toiled in so many lands, in so varied a range of climate, from the snows of Hokitiki to the torrid wastes of the Golden Belt, where camels and turbaned Afghan drivers now stood around his grave, had found his rest. Uneducated, untaught, unversed in the lore of civilisation, ancient or modern, his simple creed had been to 'go straight,' as he would have expressed it, to stand by a 'mate' to the death, to owe no man a shilling when his mining ventures paid, and to work for more when they failed. Hardy, strong, enduring, resourceful, he was a true type of those Britons who have carried Old England's flag victoriously over so many seas and

lands, and whether in peace or war earned the respect of friend and foe.

Regrets of varying depth of sadness were expressed by all the members of the pilgrim band. Due acknowledgments were made to Mrs. Maclean, with assurances that her cordial hospitality and invaluable guidance would never be forgotten. But the route was given, the camp broken up, and by an early train on the following morning the whole party set out for Hexham Hall, where by ordinary course of transit they arrived with but little delay.

Although a sense of disappointment at the unexpected and, so to speak, untoward conclusion of their pleasant rambles had communicated a serious expression to the countenances of the younger members of the party, it was explained by their leader that there was no cause for depression, or more than natural regret at the occurrence. Poor old Jack Waters had fallen in the ranks of that great Battle of Life which was each day, though unheard, unseen, in ceaseless conflict around them all. He had died in the performance of his duty, full of years, and honoured of all men. No doubt he would be borne to his grave with all befitting ceremony, and followed by a great concourse of miners and fellow-citizens. For the rest, as from the commencement of the partnership which had terminated so fortunately for the Banneret family, he had freely acknowledged his indebtedness to 'the Commissioner'—as he could not get out of the habit of designating Mr. Banneret, and also to Mrs. Banneret, whom he

loyally reverenced. By his will, made at the time, and which had never been altered, the moiety of the great mine reverted to Mr. Banneret, as also the large savings from income which he had enjoyed for many years. This was only decreased by donations to churches, charities, and benevolent associations on the Field, to which he had been in the habit of subscribing liberally, indeed lavishly, for years past. And the great concourse of his fellow-miners who followed their old comrade to the cemetery was considerably augmented by the recipients of private benefactions, known only to themselves and a few old friends.

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Hexham again! The old house, the aged oaks and elms, the shadowy woodlands; the peerless turf, in its velvet brilliancy and smoothness, so different from much of the Border country sward in which, with all its irregularity, they had so lately revelled. However, 'Home is home, be it ever so "splendid,"' if a variation be permitted from the original version, and the Bannerets, though taking kindly to their improved circumstances and more or less aristocratic surroundings, were not likely to sacrifice family comfort to any presumed mandate of fashion. Thus the young people were left free, even enjoined to amuse themselves in their own way, with rides and drives, and short excursions among the more intimate of their neighbours, until the decision of the family council was declared. This High Court and Council of the Elders consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Banneret, with the sole addition of Reginald

of that Ilk, as the eldest son and heir-apparent. It was duly constituted therefore on the day after arrival, and a first sitting was held after breakfast, while the young ladies and their attendant cavaliers strolled round the gardens, visited the stables, and afterwards attended to their correspondence until lunch time.

Mr. Banneret having visited his office, produced a collection of business papers, including one from poor old Jack Waters, of strange-appearing caligraphy, but intelligible and clear in meaning as the writer's own speech. 'You see, he says here (in a letter to me, dated shortly before the end) that he doesn't feel so well as usual; has, indeed, a sort of giddy feeling that he doesn't fancy. The doctor tells him that his heart is affected, and that he must be careful—might drop any time—

'Not a bad thing either! (he goes on to say—poor old chap!). Hope the Lord will take me that way when my time's up. I don't want no hospital business; a short call and a-done with it. That's my notion. I don't call myself an extra religious cove, but I've wronged no man—not wilful, that is—and, barrin' an extra glass or two, I've no call to think that God Almighty'll be hard on a poor old chap that's had no book larnin' and tried to do the fair thing between man and man as far as he know'd how. My respects to the family, and to Mrs. Banneret above all. She helped me more than once, or twice either, when I was low down. It's my wish, though I'm not going to alter my will, that she shall have a trifle, separate and privit for herself, say ten thousand pound—and the young gentlemen and young ladies, five thousand a-piece to remember pore old Jack by.

'You'll find the accounts right. I've had 'em ordited reg'lar by a gentleman as we both know and trust. It's the best way. I will now say good-bye, sir! Life's

uncertain. God bless you and yours, as has allwaies been good to me, rich or poor; and I'm glad the mine's turned out a blessin' to all concerned, as I sed it would.—I remaine, Yours true & faithful, JOHN WATERS.'

'One thing I forgot to menshun. There's Docter Barnarder's Home for pore little boys and gals. It's been in my mind a goodish while. It's about the best thing in that line as I ever herd tell of. I hadn't much more chance than them children. I was turned out to get my livin' preshus early—only it was in the country, not the town, lucky for me, where I growed up strong and hardy, thank the Lord! I want that docter to have a thousand down and a hundred a year afterwards. Lord Brassey's the President I am told. I seen him in Melbourne when he was guv'nor there. He'll take care things goes right, I'll be bound. So no more from old Jack.'

There were tears in Mrs. Banneret's eyes when the letter, longer than his ordinary literary efforts, was concluded. 'Poor old fellow!' she said. 'How well I remember the morning you drove me into Barrawong to hear his story and give my casting vote. How weak and ill he looked! But I felt sure he was speaking the truth. And so we accepted the "Last Chance," luckily for us all!'

'Yes, indeed. I believe your vote turned the scale. A little thing would have prevented me taking the risk. So many golden hopes had proved failures. There was Annandale-Wilson, such a fine fellow—clever, experienced, high up in the Civil Service—lost all his savings in just such another tempting investment. Indirectly it caused his death, I believe, from work and worry.'

'How sorry we both were, I remember. Well

we must be grateful that our lot in life is different. But I don't like this new departure. Shall you have to go out again? Remember we are not so young as we were. Can't you send any one?'

'It is so difficult to find any one with full knowledge of mining who, at the same time, can be absolutely trusted. Reggie, of course, is too young, and has not been in the way of mining matters lately.'

'If you will allow me to give an opinion, I fail to see your point, sir. Who was it as to age that began life at seventeen on his own account, and made rather a success of it, as I've heard tell? As to mining, you must have forgotten that Eric and I made a "cradle," and went into the alluvial till we nearly washed out gold to the value of one pound sterling. Besides, at Barrawong, near a mining township with twenty thousand miners, we heard nothing *but* of mines and technical terms, block and frontage—quartz and alluvial—half-ounce dirt and payable stone. Why, we have all the lore and science of gold extraction at our fingers' ends!'

'I see,' said his father with a quiet smile, 'that I have been making the ordinary parental mistake of not seeing that my children have really grown up. What do you propose then? Are you prepared with a suggestion?'

'Of course I am,' said the youngster confidently. 'The solution is easy. Old Jack Waters being dead—dear old fellow that he was—there appears a chance of the Pilot Mount community becoming

disorganised, unless a person with recognised authority takes command. The appointment of a stranger would be risky, or perhaps ineffectual. You must go out and take me with you as lieutenant and adjutant. I shall soon pick up the necessary "colonial experience." Eric is to stay at Hexham to look after mother and the girls, as well as to see that no one gets the weather-gauge of me with Corisande in my absence. And, I think, that's about all, sir.'

'All, indeed!' said his mother, looking at her first-born with a mixture of surprise and admiration. 'You seem to have summed up the situation with what looks like completeness, and certainly the idea seems feasible. We shall be "Marianas in our moated grange," of course, in your absence, but under more favourable social conditions. What does your father say?'

'Really, my dear, he seems to be cast for the part of "Brer Rabbit," and to have nothing left but to "go on sayin' nothin'." With the aid and counsel of the eldest son, and your not less original aid, you have quite disposed of all difficulties. When do we start, my dear? To-morrow morning?'

'Nonsense, Arnold! You know there is something else to be done first; and, privately, you are thanking your stars for the chance of a little change and travel. I have no objection—or rather, I *have*, as I always have had; but I don't urge it when it is plainly a duty. So I shall "buckle your spurs upon your heel" metaphorically, as I used to do sometimes practically in old days. Reggie, my boy, I trust you to look after your

father and discourage unnecessary risks. Now I must go and tell the girls.'

And the brave matron, certainly the virtual head of the household, departed to make important communications in a mood much less calm and self-contained than her words and outward appearance indicated.

'There appears nothing else for it,' said the father to the son, after a few moments' reflection. 'It's rather a bore, and hard on your mother, though she won't admit it, my having to start off for the other end of the world at a moment's notice. But apart from the importance of the issue at stake, it will do you good to see something more of the land where your countrymen are at work, extending this Empire of ours, or rather strengthening the foundations, now it has been raised to such a height. Our forefathers "builded better than they knew."'

'I am with you, sir, to the death—which is not a figure of speech. With regard to the mining, pure and simple, Eric and I haven't so much to learn, though, of course, this Pilot Mount property is a far more extensive and scientific affair. But at Barrawong I remember hearing you say that in five years of your reign there, the miners won sixteen tons of alluvial gold. Not such a trifle, was it?'

'Quite correct. Embodied in one of my Annual Reports, with the ounces, pennyweights, and grains added from the returns of the Mining Registrar. It is there now for reference. However, I daresay we can straighten up things, and see the different colonies within six months. Four

weeks to Albany, nowadays, makes short work of the voyage to Australia.'

The bombshell, as exploded by Mrs. Banneret on her return from the conference, produced much surprise and a certain amount of consternation among the young people. But after the smoke cleared away, so to speak, confidence returned, as it became gradually apparent that no harm was likely to result. At first, Corisande was disposed to insist upon going home, and writing to apprise her mother. But on its being represented that her leave extended to the end of the autumn, and that whether she availed herself of it in travel, or by remaining at Hexham with her friends, could make no difference to her family, she consented to remain. The military and the naval brother succumbed to the same argument, perhaps the more readily as certain county entertainments were to take place shortly. The question was fully debated, and as, obviously, it seemed unkind to desert Hexham on the occasion of their host and the eldest son leaving for foreign parts, a compromise was agreed to.

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On the appointed day, therefore, the Peninsular and Oriental Company's royal mail steamer *Mesopotamia*, 10,500 tons, had in her passenger list the names of Arnold and Reginald Banneret, booked for Fremantle, West Australia. Nothing out of the ordinary range of P. & O. passengers' mild adventures occurred until the Red Sea was reached. the historic waters of which were destined in their case to furnish a truly sensational incident. At Suez they had dined in the great quadrangle of

the P. & O. Hotel, in the open air, where immense tables had been set out. It was a bizarre and dramatic scene. Above them the cloudless blue sky; around and afar the limitless sands of the Desert. Every variety of costume and headdress diversified the three hundred and fifty passengers—Arab turbans of scarlet and yellow, or white and pink with gold edges.

A few days afterwards the *Mesopotamia* was slipping smoothly and pleasantly through the calm waters of the historic sea, on which hardly a ripple was visible. On the north-west shore were the irregular peaks and jagged outlines of the mountains of Palestine. It was the charming after-breakfast interval, when there was absolutely nothing to do but to read or frivol aimlessly. Mr. Banneret was walking up and down, his son was applying himself to an abstruse treatise on auriferous formations, when the Captain appeared on deck, and after a short colloquy with a quartermaster, joined the officer on the bridge.

'What do you make of that?' he asked, gazing at a faint line, which gradually made itself distinct athwart the fair blue sky.

'Smoke of a steamer, sir—Russian battleship. It's one of those volunteer cruisers let through the Canal, under a promise not to carry more than so many guns.'

'She is overhauling us at a great rate,' said the Captain. 'I'd better prepare the passengers.'

This was hardly necessary, as every field-glass—and there were some good ones on board—had been directed at the strange vessel for the last few

minutes. All now knew that she was a Russian volunteer cruiser, which had been watching the Red Sea for vessels carrying contraband of war, and that they would be stopped and searched, unless, indeed, the Russian captain decided to sink the *Mesopotamia* first and explain afterwards. This had been done before, they reflected, in the case of the *Knight Commander*. It was not a pleasant idea. Some of the lady passengers turned pale; they all behaved with commendable self-possession.

There was no doubt as to the intention of the Russian volunteer cruiser. Rapidly approaching, she fired a shot across the bows of the *Mesopotamia* and signalled to her to stop until a boat, which promptly left the cruiser's side, could come on board. The boat was so crowded with armed men that there was hardly room for the oarsmen. At the same time the look-out man reported 'big steamer on the weather bow.' All turned with deep interest towards the strange vessel, that in the excitement concentrated on the Russian cruiser had approached nearer than the officers of the *Mesopotamia* had remarked. Then occurred a change of front. For some unexplained reason the order now given to the *Mesopotamia's* head engineer was 'Full speed ahead,' the effect of which moved the huge liner anew on her course, leaving the Russian row-boat far behind. At the same time her launch, just lowered, was hauled on board again.

The excitement of the passengers became intense. The stranger steamer, which was coming

up at a high rate of speed, altered her course a couple of points and steered straight for the P. & O. liner, when she suddenly hoisted the Japanese flag. Then it was seen that this vessel, much larger, carrying more guns and apparently a greater number of men than the Russian cruiser, was the new Japanese battleship the *Hatsuce*.

The Russian cruiser apparently recognised this fact, for she changed her course, and after taking her boat on board went the way she came. The Japanese man-of-war came up and signalled the *Mesopotamia* to heave-to. Presently a boat with eight oars came alongside. It was not an ordinary ship's boat, but, to every one's wild astonishment, a 'whaleboat,' and the tall man with the heavy white moustache, who had the steer oar in his hand, was no other than our old friend Captain Bucklaw (otherwise Hayston), who had volunteered for service with Japan at the beginning of the war, and characteristically risen to his present position.

What a joyful recognition and interchange of greetings was there, and how grateful were all the lady passengers who crowded round him, as he stepped on the deck with his old air of conquest and authority, as of a Viking on a conquered galley.

'How in the world did you come here?' asked Mr. Banneret; 'you are always turning up in the nick of time. In the service of the Mikado, too?'

'There are few services in which I have not sailed or fought,' said the Captain. 'And many a year ago I fought side by side with a crew of

Japanese sailors. In old South Sea Island days Captain Peese and I were trading in a small brigantine which we owned at the time, when we had to fight for our lives.'

'Oh, do tell us!' pleaded the wife of a colonial governor as the passengers crowded round.

'It was my first visit,' said he, 'to the Pelew Islands, whence a young chief, known as Prince Lee Boo, had been taken to England and had there died, to the great grief of all who knew him. An enthusiastic writer had described his countrymen as "delicate in their sentiments, friendly in their dispositions," and, in short, a people who do honour to the human race.' The Captain's description of the undaunted manner in which fifty of these noble islanders, who tried to cut them off, climbed up the side of the brigantine and slashed away at the boarding nettings with their heavy swords, was truly graphic. Stripped to the waist, they fought gallantly and unflinchingly, though twelve of their number had been killed by the fire of musketry from the brigantine. One of them had seized Captain Peese, and, dragging him to the side, stabbed him in the neck, and threw him into the prahu alongside, where his head would soon have left his body, when Hayston and a Japanese sailor dashed over after him and killed the two natives that were holding him down, while another was about to decapitate him. At this stage, three of the brigantine's crew lay dead and nearly all were wounded. There were twenty-two islanders killed and as many more badly wounded before they gave up the attempt to cut off the

vessel. 'Since then,' remarked the Captain, as he concluded his narrative, 'I have had my own opinion about Japanese on sea and on land.'

'But how did you happen to get a naval command?'

'Well, I knew, of course, that they had Britishers in their employ, both officers and men. So I applied for the first vacant berth. It wasn't long before I was put into commission with the *Hatsuce* here. Isn't she a beauty? One of the two boats bought from the republic of Chile. She has a torpedo delivery, too, and ten 4-inch quick-firers, besides three Maxims, carries heavier metal than any ship of her size, and can work up to twenty-five knots. But I'm disappointed that Russian fellow wouldn't stop. Our little engagement would have interested the ladies.'

Years had, of course, told upon the bold buccaneer. Silvered were the hair and moustache, but the grand form, the stately bearing, were unaltered. The bold blue eyes had lost nothing of their fire or fascination. He was, as ever, a general favourite and *succès de salon*, in spite of rumours of wild deeds in other days. On leaving, he carried with him the good wishes of the lady passengers and nearly all those of the opposite sex, especially when he professed his intention of escorting them to within neutral waters.

Colombo, with its brilliant leafage and gorgeous colour-scheme, seemed to be quite a short sea-trip after their sensational adventure. It was familiar to Arnold Banneret, but to his son Reginald the erstwhile Dutch fortresses had all the effect and

excitement of novelty. The half-European, half-Oriental flavour of all things, the luxurious habits of the residents, the population—various of colour, race, and religion, the paradisial forest surroundings, the wondrous temples, lakes, ruins, relics of a perished civilisation, came with unexpected freshness to the younger man, who on his first journey to England had been too young to appreciate the wonders and glories of this, one of the latest and richest of England's Crown Colonies.

'What a wonderful outlook!' said Reginald, as they sat at breakfast in a lofty cool room at the G.F.H. (as the Galle Face Hotel is irreverently and familiarly known). 'It is good to travel. How it broadens one's views! What a change from that pestilential Port Said and the Red Sea! By the way, I hope the *Times* is making a row about our threatened capture. These blundering Russians *did* take the *Malacca* a month since, and put an armed crew on board. What a bore if we had met with the adventure! Captain Bucklaw and his Japanese cruiser saved us from that fate. What a magnificent fellow the Captain is! I never saw a finer man in my life, although he is growing old. What adventures he has had! You knew him years ago, didn't you, sir?'

'Yes, many years ago. He *is* a most remarkable man, as you say; but that he is the right man in the right place occasionally, and was so when we met him, no one can doubt for a moment. I will tell you more about him another time.'

Albany—Fremantle—Perth—all outposts of the 'Briton's far-flung line' of conquest and

colonisation, the latter the more important operation of the two, were successively reached, and now, in Reggie Banneret's eyes, far their most exciting and interesting objective came within the range of vision. That Aladdin's cave, Pilot Mount, was at length reached, and the great desert-seeming panorama, strange and unfamiliar as it was to the graduate of Cambridge, did not fail to impress him on that account.

'This is something like!' he exclaimed. 'It is so delightfully un-English, except in results. Such a true, unadulterated bit of Africa, Australia, America, all in one. Don't let any one say it's unconventional, uncomfortable, disagreeable. Why, that's the beauty of it all. It's what I came out to see; what makes one proud of being an Englishman, that is, an Australian, which is all the same, of course. I must say I like to belong to people that have *done* things.'

'And suffered too,' said his father. 'You must not forget that side of the adventure; it is, or rather was, very essential.'

'I suppose there was a good deal of that ingredient mixed up with the gold and glory of the earlier days of the Field.'

'Field is a very apposite expression as applied to gold areas—battlefield almost more appropriate, when typhoid fever decimated the men in every camp; hunger, thirst, and privation of every kind took toll; when water was dearer than wine or spirits on many goldfields. And now, what a transformation!'

'Transformation indeed!' said the younger

man ; 'it appears to me like the work of an enchanter who has waved his wand, and lo, behold! what has arisen? Spouting fountains where the famished horses and camels scraped the barren sand ; the green growth of gardens, irrigated and fertilised ; fruit and vegetables, and this'—looking round the lofty, spacious room in which they had been dining. 'Waiter, bring more ice. This Chasselas will be none the worse for cooling.'

The formal reception of the mining magnate of Pilot Mount was much like any other function of the sort, and was transacted with the usual, or, perhaps, slightly unusual formalities. Once the principal shareholder and part owner of a very valuable mining property, Arnold Banneret was now almost the sole owner. Old Jack Waters's will had been proved, probate had been granted, and all necessary forms complied with. The erst ex-Commissioner of Goldfields at Barrawong, in New South Wales, found himself one of the richest men in Australia. The mine was a 'going concern' in every sense of the word, but after a month's sojourn, a steadily increasing desire to see once more the higher aspects of civilisation commenced to assert itself, though there was a club well-conducted and most comfortable, and also polo—a game of which Reggie was passionately fond, with ponies which were excellent, the members practised and well-mannered. The working of the great mine, with all the latest appliances for the extraction of the precious metal, and 2000 men on the pay-roll, was in itself an interesting, even exciting, spectacle—a triumph of mechanism to watch ; all

but human in so much of its automatic action. But even this source of interest and occupation came to an end, and one day Reggie confessed to his father that after, of course, a look-in at Sydney and Melbourne, he should not be sorry to be on board a P. & O. liner once more.

'If I did not feel,' said his father, 'that I was quitting Australia for the last time, which is for me a mournful reflection, I should welcome the idea; but I cannot regard the desertion of one's native land, in my case and yours, as merely a matter of practical convenience.

> 'The land which knew my life's best hours,
> Ere Fate had gloomed youth's vernal bowers,
> And Hope's bright blossoms marred,

as some boyish rhymer has it.'

'Australia has done well for us, sir,' said the young fellow, 'and you have done something for her, permit me to say, in rearing a family true to the best traditions of the dear old land, our Mother England, God bless her! It remains with them to carry out your policy, and as your heir and eldest son I dedicate myself to the task.'

'God bless you, my boy!' said Arnold Banneret, grasping his hand. 'You have spoken like the son of your father, and *his* father, who was strong on the point of the loyalty of Australia to the Crown. How often have I heard him condemn the self-indulgent, luxurious lives spent by the sons of wealthy colonists. Only, what about this P. & O. arrangement?'

'I have thought of that, sir. Pilot Mount will

run alone, and keep straight by itself for a year. Within that time I propose to return, if I can get the permission of a certain young lady—I may as well say *the* young lady—to help in the colonisation scheme.'

'I understand, my dear boy. I trust the affair may come off. You have my best wishes. But consider the climate, the—I don't say rougher, but the untried social conditions of colonial life. Take thought ere it be too late, I beg of you.'

'I *have* considered that side of the matter well, my dear Dad; and if Corisande be the girl I take her to be, she will like the life all the better for the opportunity of watching the development of a great British community from its initial stages.'

'Possibly, possibly, my dear boy; knowing what I do of life and feminine characteristics I dare not say probably. That will be for you to discover by experience. Everything, that is, everything connected with the success, the happiness, even the comfort of your after life, depends upon the result of that experiment.'

CHAPTER XX

. . . . . .

AGAIN the train, the monotonous stretches of level waste, unbroken save here and there by straggling villages, or prosperous farm-holdings; rich and populous goldfields, or, as occasionally happened, ill-fated and deserted mines, with melancholy machinery, all rusted and abandoned. On these and other landmarks was writ large the tale of hope and enterprise, success, decay, despair. All were heedfully observed and noted by the younger traveller; as regularly explained and classified by the less impulsive senior. Then darkness, a cooler atmosphere, lights, sea strand, city and hotel—goal of the weary traveller!

. . . . . .

England again! Hexham Hall. Again the aged woods, the peerless turf, the murmuring brook, the delicious, settled comfort of English country life. Then such rides and drives, such traps and drags, broughams and landaus!—all the component parts of fully appointed coach-houses and stables, where expense was not too closely regarded; such, and all other matters of com-

parative luxury, seemed to be forthcoming with a sort of Arabian Nights profusion.

Then, to crown all, they had left West Australia in its autumnal month of March, and were here in April.

Oh, to be in England, now that April's here!

sang Browning from Italy, and it seemed as if every thrush and blackbird in Hexham woods had echoed the aspiration. It was a season of hope and joy, if ever such a halcyon time occurred on this occasionally untoward-seeming planet. Mrs. Banneret was serenely, though secretly, exultant, because her husband and first-born had safely returned, having successfully carried out the object of their mission. Hermione and Vanda, passionately fond of their brothers, and much petted by their father, were charmed with the state of matters generally, and looked forward to even more important developments when Lord and Lady Hexham, with 'darling Corisande,' after which fashion that young lady was generally alluded to, should arrive in a week's time. Eric had taken his degree creditably at Cambridge, if not brilliantly. If he had not won the triumph of a 'double first' like Reggie, he had done enough for honour.

There were, of course, the hunting fixtures to be arranged for. The Hexham stud was in great form and buckle. The Banneret girls, who had ridden all sorts of horses over all sorts of fences and roads since earliest childhood, were finished performers across country. Truth to tell, unless they came to grief through 'trappy' hedge and

ditch obstacles, there was no danger of their being stopped by English fences after the stiff posts and rails of their native land. They looked forward to glorious performances when Reggie would be able to escort them.

'Don't expect too much, my good Vanda,' said Hermione; 'he'll be too nervous about Corisande's getting hurt, to trouble about you and me. A *fiancée* counts for ever so much more than the dearest sisters.'

'I can hardly believe that; but we must make allowances. If Corisande accepts him, we may be thankful. He might have been caught by some smart colonial girl. Some of them are very good-looking.'

'Are they, indeed? Who is a snob now? as you sometimes say to me. And what are we but colonial?'

'Oh, but we're different!'

'I can't see it. Dad has been lucky, and we are ever so rich—of course "in the swim," and so on; but as for being anything that entitles us to look down on our countrywomen, the idea is ludicrous. Don't let people say we can't stand our oats.'

'I apologise, and promise not to offend again. Of course it's absurd to talk as if we were anything but middle-class people, though of course the Banneret family is as old as the Heptarchy.'

'That's very well to know; but the less we bother about family descent, the more people will think of us. The Honourable Corisande is a good sort, and an Earl's daughter. Rank, when

there's money to back it up, *is* a good thing socially. No sensible person denies it. But the *woman*, the real woman, apart from all other considerations, is what makes for happiness in marriage, or otherwise. *We* know this one to be a straight, plucky, good-tempered girl, with no nonsense about her; fond too of Reggie, which is everything. So if the high contracting parties agree about settlements and things, it will be all plain sailing.'

'It's a big *if*; but Reggie's good-looking, clever, and presentable—well off too. He's a catch as men go. I daresay it will come off. But will she go to West Australia?'

'If she cares about him, she'll go *anywhere*, and be happy if he is with her; if she only cares about herself, she'll be miserable everywhere, and it won't matter where she goes.'

Not many days after this important colloquy, the arrival was announced in the society papers of the Earl and Countess of Hexham and their daughters at Hexham Hall, which they were revisiting on the invitation of the owner. Mr. Banneret and his eldest son, lately returned from West Australia, had been on a tour of inspection over their extensive mining and other properties. This information was followed by notices of various hunting fixtures, at which the Misses Banneret and their brother, accompanied by the Earl of Hexham and the Honourable Corisande Aylmer, took leading positions. They were admirably mounted, and, like all Australian colonists, rode fearlessly yet with judgment. Lady Hexham,

with Mrs. Banneret and the Honourable Adeline Aylmer, drove to the meet in the Hexham landau. There were other functions and festivities, few of which the young people missed; as, indeed, why should they? Youth is the time for enjoyment, and being all of the right age, healthy, happy, and hopeful, they enjoyed the pleasures suitable to the season, to their age and position, with all the ardour of early youth. They went everywhere and did everything,—hunting, polo, balls, garden parties. It did not pass without notice that the young people of the new and the old Hexham families were constantly together, and that at all social gatherings and entertainments Reggie Banneret was never very far from the Honourable Corisande's vicinity. Of course the heads of departments, not to mention the juniors of both families, were not unobservant of these coincidences, but like wise parents and relations 'went on sayin' nothin'' until events should shape themselves definitely.

So it came to pass, after one of the great functions of the period—to be precise, it was the annual county ball—that Corisande came to her mother with her confession. Reggie Banneret had spoken out—said, in fact, that he had felt from the first moment he saw her that there was no other woman in the world for him, and so on, and so on. 'I won't bore you, mother,' said the girl, 'but he said all the usual things men say at such times, I suppose, and a few more. He *is* clever, though a trifle too romantic—isn't he? and—*I love him*.'

'My dear child,' said the matron, stroking her hair tenderly as she knelt before her with her head on her mother's lap, 'you could not bore me on such an occasion as this, involving indeed your future happiness as well as that of all related to you. It is not a matter to be treated lightly, whatever the people composing "the smart set" may say.'

'And what do *you* say, my darling mother?' said Corisande, raising her head, while her eyes shone the more brightly, as the tear-drops fell slowly, when she made her appeal.

'My dear, dear Corisande,' said the elder woman, as she half-rose and drew the sobbing girl more closely to her, 'you have no reason to be in doubt as to our reply—your father's and mine—to Reginald's offer. We have noticed his attentions. They were open and straightforward. Had we disapproved, we should have returned to Bruges, and so withdrawn from the hazard of an unsuitable marriage. But so far from disapproval, you can tell your Reginald and our new relations that we have no hesitation in giving our unqualified consent. We have had abundant opportunities of knowing the family characteristics, and have come to the conclusion that we like and respect ALL the members of the Banneret family, and have reason to bless the day when we made their acquaintance.'

Lord Hexham was absent in London, having retreated to his club, as he commonly did when there was any function on hand which did not specially demand his attendance.

'I'm getting too old (he wrote) for these late-at-night racketings and standings about. I know where I am at afternoon whist in the Senior United and the Travellers', but I don't dance now, and balls bore me. You and the girls, my Lady, can manage these minor matters a deal better than I can. There's no objection that I can see to Corisande's marriage, if they've made up their minds to tackle the Great Experiment. Who is it says that—Thackeray, or some other fellow? I never was good at quotations. What I mean is, that he is a presentable, steady young fellow, with brains—done well at Cambridge, hasn't he?—good-looking—that is, looks like a gentleman, which is the main thing. The betting's six to four on, with such a good start. He's got the wherewithal—can't do without that. So clap 'em on the back, my Lady—you know what I mean—and tell 'em I'll sign, seal, and deliver when the settlements are ready. Corisande's a good girl; hope she won't go too far away—rough place West Australia—but I daresay they'll fit in. I knew Jerry Taylour, K.C.B.; we were "subs" together in old army days. They tell me he's Governor out there. Daresay he'll ask 'em to dinner. Expect me a day or two before *the* day. HEXHAM.'

His Lordship, as he freely owned, was not good at letter-writing; but this was much from him, and to the point. It conveyed more than many carefully composed epistles. He meant what he said, and once his word was given never departed from it. Lady Hexham knew he would

arrive punctually. She was wise in not requiring him to stay at Hexham too long at one time. He had never, he said, 'cared much for country life.' He was a man of town habitudes and occupations. At Bruges, of course, he compelled himself to conform to the altered circumstances of the family. And this, to his credit be it spoken, he managed to do, without loss of cash or self-respect.

However, since the sale of the old Hall and estate, matters had changed wonderfully for the better. With his sons doing well in the Army and Navy, his eldest daughter engaged to a young fellow who was likely to make a figure in the world, and was, moreover, a man of fortune, things were looking up. Why he wanted to go back to Australia, he couldn't understand. Were not England and the Continent good enough for him—for any man? Corisande would have to go too, he supposed. Well, she was a good girl; her place, with her ideas, was with her husband. He didn't approve of wives being in one hemisphere and husbands in another. Didn't work well—not in his experience at any rate. Colonies weren't such bad places either—come to think: the money came from there; and but for it and the man who made it—a gentleman *aux bouts des ongles*—they would all have been stuck at Bruges for years to come. The Hexham family, at any rate, had no right to grumble.

All in good time the more important function connected with Hexham Hall was concluded to

the satisfaction of all concerned. The settlements were even more liberal than the hereditary family solicitor of the Aylmers had suggested, or than Lady Hexham, who had an unseen but controlling influence in such matters, had hoped for. As for the young people, according to their age and unwisdom they pooh-poohed such trivialities, holding that the love that never shall die—

> Till the sun grows cold,
> And the stars are old,
> And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold—

would be amply sufficient in its tenderness and truth to guard their future lives from all 'ills that flesh is heir to,' and more besides. But their elders knew better. So everything was done with due legal form and security: trustees appointed, and all the rest of it.

The wedding came off triumphantly at St. James's, Hanover Square. The day, wonderful to relate, was fine; all the surroundings seemed sympathetic. Two tall, handsome Australian cousins came home by the *Moldavia*, P. & O., just in time to make up the proper number of bridesmaids who walked up the aisle with the impressive dignity proper to the occasion. Half London was there, of course. Every one wanted to see the bridegroom, erroneously reported to have twenty thousand a year, and to have worked as a digger on the field before he 'made his pile.' And when Lord Hexham led the Honourable Corisande to the altar, the stately peer and his lovely daughter evoked audible exclamations of approval. Finally,

as amid the melodious crash of the 'Wedding March,' Reggie Banneret and she walked out as wedded pair, the friends of both families, and even mere acquaintances, seemed infected with that mysterious feminine sympathy which at all weddings finds relief in tears.

THE END

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